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THE MINX



MRS MANNINGTON
CAFFYN

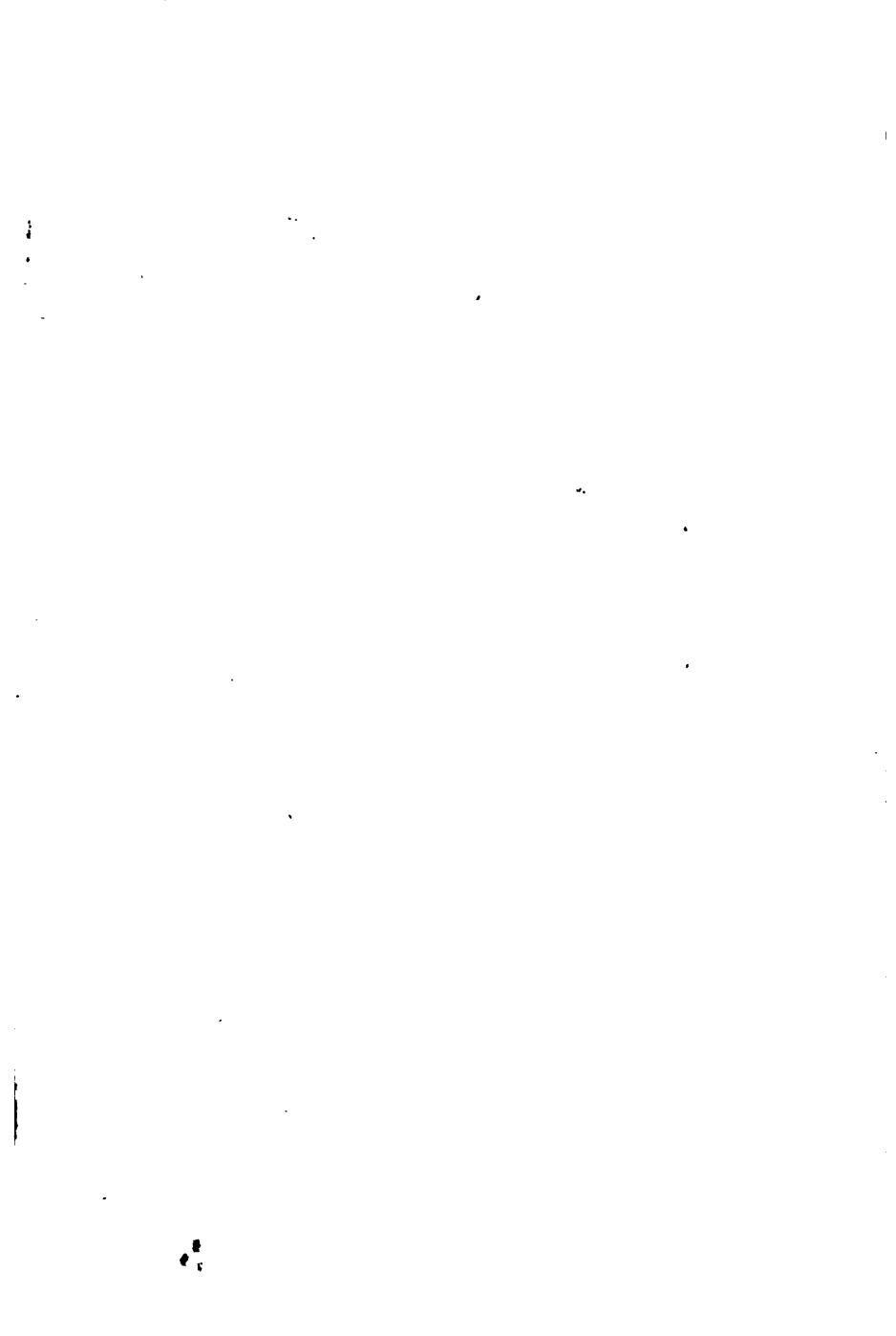
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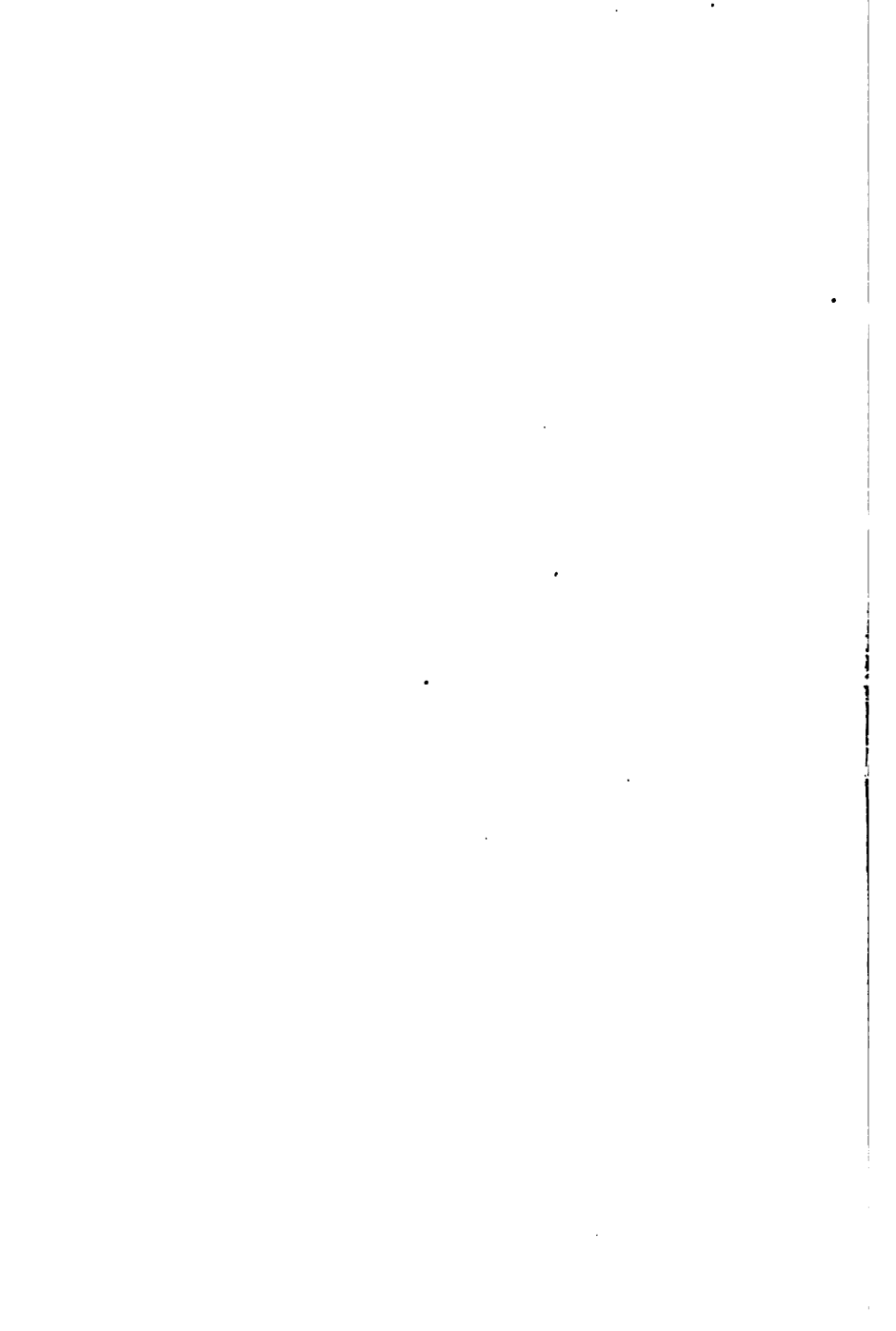


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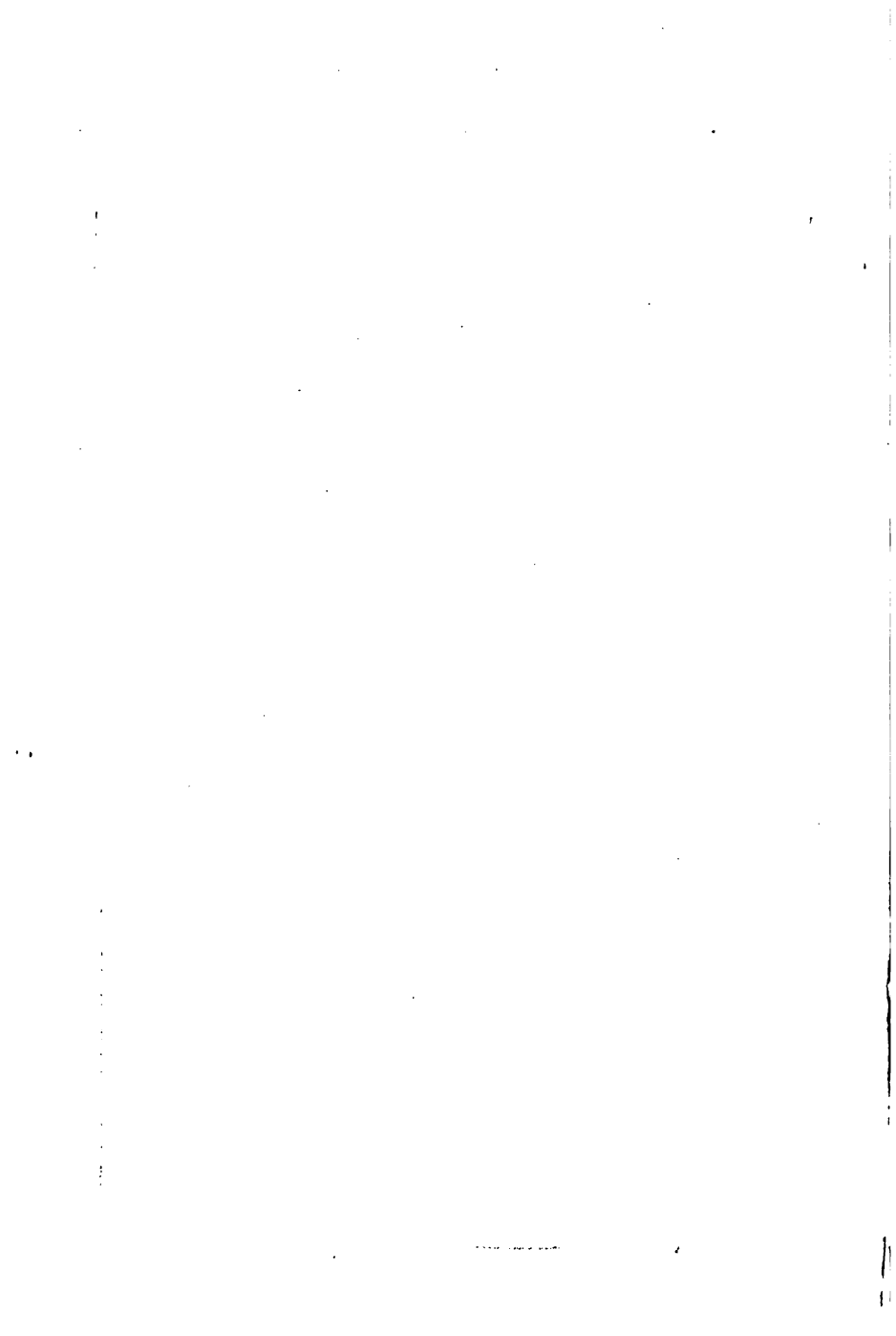
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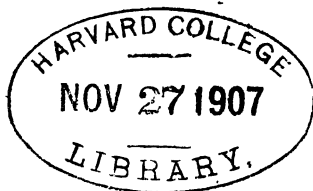
A Novel

Kathleen BY
MRS. [^]MANNINGTON CAFFYN



NEW YORK
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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THE MINX.

CHAPTER I.

OLD SQUIRE HALLOWES was, as it happened, really very glad of the interruption. He had had about enough of serious study for that day, and wanted to talk of Jock.

But he thought rightly upon many subjects, more especially upon the subjection of woman, and, when unchecked of man, her calamitous significance in the disintegration of the social fabric.

He lifted his eyes from his book grudgingly, rested them upon his wife, threw down his glasses and looked harassed.

"Bless my soul," said he, "you don't mean to say that you're back again on the fatted-calf tack? You don't seem in the least to realise the fellow from the higher point of view—the responsible point of view. You appear to think that you can wrap up the whole of a lad comfortably in domestic economy, and there's an end of him! With the fellow hardly begun, and the whole country-side teeming with girls with the devil's own complexion, and not a stiver among 'em to console a husband with when the complexion's gone."

"Oh! my dear Anthony, there's Betty, with everything!"

He paused to marvel at her simplicity.

"My dear lady, Betty's cut out for the boy, and so are her prospects. We're dealing, however, with human nature, and this being so, it's only through much tribulation that the poor fool will ever reach Betty Rawson, if indeed he ever reaches her at all. Naturally he'll prefer first to run the gauntlet of all the portionless hussies in the country. And if that wasn't enough for a poor chap

with an establishment to keep up, and little or nothing to do it on"—Anthony paused to look apologetically at his wife—"there are *Others* to face and overcome. Your sex has a lot to answer for, ma'am. And to add to it," said he, hurriedly changing the subject, "with his depraved modern education, the unfortunate boy will be wanting to take serious views of life. Good Lord! as if life wasn't serious enough in itself, without tricking it out in the grave clothes which in this depressing age they call Philosophy."

"Let's hope, then, that the gravity of modern education may have drilled the taste for girls out of Jock," said the little old lady, Anthony's wife, in low tones, of a most sedate sweetness, beginning a fresh row upon her scarlet silken sock.

"It can't drill Nature out of him. Rage how it will, it's little effect it will have upon the 'common dotages of humankind.' Wine—" he paused, looking a little regretful. "Oh, well, wine's nothing nowadays; the nerves of the fellow won't stand it. But woman is the same as she always was; nerves can't safeguard him from her. She'll infatuate and besot while there's breath in her body. She'll prance and caper, and bedizen herself so long as there's a young fool to deceive and inveigle. She'll spend, so long as he'll pay. The corner-stone and the coping-stone to all the woes of all the ages!" Anthony tapped his tome with gentle indulgence and smiled sagaciously. "Poor old Burton! And to pretend that all this was the outcome of hearsay knowledge! Heigh-ho! And Jock a pink-cheeked fool!"

"But—my dear Anthony, with your experience to guide him," said little Cecilia Hallowses, soothingly. A singular light, which at odd moments shone in her quiet eyes, made Anthony square his shoulders. It was an elusive flash, gone almost before you could consider it, but it always suggested to the Squire that it might be as well to assert his manhood. No observant man but must regard it in the light of a delicate challenge.

"But what's the use of discussing matters of this nature with women?" said Mr. Hallowses sadly, but still

looking askew at his wife. "There's not a woman living, I grant you, who wouldn't feel herself equal to moralising the last spark of decency out of an Archbishop. But then the less a woman knows on any subject, the stronger does she feel about it, the more eager is she to discuss it; and in regard to man—her favourite theme—why, instead of proclaiming in the market-place her ignorant surmises concerning him, she ought to be continually thanking God in her closet because of the paucity of her knowledge! For indeed, if women are bad," he murmured, "men are worse."

"Still, with women a little goes a long way," said Cecilia, with a mild glance. Anthony regarded her through his spectacles with but limited approval. He was a just man, however, not above admitting, upon occasion, to a kink or so in his own armour, when he could discern rank slits in that of Cecilia.

"That's the deuce of it," he muttered. "That's where you have us." Whereupon he slipped dejectedly back into silence and his brown book.

"Are you so anxious about Jock?" said Cecilia presently, after a pause, in which her thin, white, blue-veined hands rested idle on the bright sock, and her eyes were turned upon Anthony. The kindness in these eyes was all for her husband, but the perplexed trouble that grew up in them slowly had nothing whatsoever to do with him.

"I know him very little, of course," she went on, apologetically, "but he always seems to me to be so healthy, and," she added, half shyly, "so very pure—so—so splendidly pure. And he is twenty-four. He must have had many temptations?"

"Temptations!" snorted Anthony. "Flea-bites, ma'am, flea-bites! with the start God and his constitution gave him. Captain of his eleven before he was twelve years old, a pink-faced brat of a baby! The pick of all the distinctions at Rugby before he was seventeen! Rowed in his College eight his second year at Oxford, and not an idle bone in his body! There's been no room for minxes in Jock's life."

"Oh!" said Cecilia, with a relieved sigh.

"But he's a man, ma'am," pursued Anthony, inexorably. "And here you're out of it, my dear, thanks be to God! Jock's a man—not a graven image, I tell you. And with man, experience, like a ravening lion, blocks the road.

"There's time for all things—for the whole precious curriculum—in the like of Jock, with all his wits about him and his five senses; not a half-baked, mock-man of a thing like the half of 'em! Jock's a faithfully built, well-thought-out structure," said the Squire, with mingled pride and apprehension, "and when the time for the minx comes, take my word for it, there she'll be. Just the fellow to be crucified by his own folly! Look at the build of him! Lord, Lord, but it's hard for a man to do justice to his constitution and at the same time save his immortal soul. Be thankful you're a woman, ma'am, who has never borne sons," added the blundering Squire, with a congratulatory nod.

Cecilia reddened, winced, and took up her knitting again.

"Aren't you letting Burton weigh rather heavily on your mind, Anthony?" said she. "Try a little of the Bible, dear man. The Old Testament. It's a more simple tonic."

"The Old Testament? Is it the Old Testament she's recommending to me! Crammed with stark, staring, human truths! A commentary, every second chapter of it, on my text! The Old Testament was written for man by man, and bristles with hard, masculine truths."

"Still," said Cecilia, "it teaches women something of the long-suffering and loving-kindness of God, and," she added, modestly, "it enables her to understand, in some degree, how immensely difficult it must be even for a good man—an Example, so to speak—to save his soul at all."

"Oh, well," admitted Anthony, "if that's all the harm it does her!—" Perceiving a singular look about Cecilia's mouth, and feeling himself to be upon untried ground, Mr. Hallowes decided to leave the sentence incomplete.

Seeing him, for the moment, harmlessly preoccupied, and feeling upon her part no pressing obligation to disturb his reflections, Mrs. Hallowes' thoughts flew off to the more fearful and imminent subject of young Jock, the Squire's heir and her stepson, who was to come home this day for good.

For many days, indeed, Mrs. Hallowes' thoughts, in all her spare moments, had flown off to hover fearfully around Jock, this great six-foot-two mystery to whom she was about to be a mother.

She had seen Jock at odd times ever since he was born. The day his mother was buried, when she went with her sick old uncle, a punctilious gentleman, with a passion for well-appointed funerals, to do honour to the dead woman, she had caught sight of Jock, crowing in the arms of his weeping nurse. And that night she cried herself to sleep, not because of poor little Dora Hallowes—she scarce knew her,—but for what the girl must have suffered in leaving behind her this little, lovely, alive, rejoicing creature, so exquisitely, and intimately, and marvellously her own.

The better part of Cecilia's life, as it happened, was spent in sick rooms. Ever since she was nineteen, indeed, no sooner was one sick relative caught away, than another was raised up to take his place. And Cecilia, being a woman of tender touches and insufficient self-assertion, gave in weakly to her fate, and spent herself in steering sundry poor, selfish souls through the darkness. So that, as time went on, the glimpses she caught of little Jock were fleeting, and frequently aloft from a latticed window, behind which some afflicted gentleman lay groaning and rapping out at intervals vicious comments upon the vanity of all things, and the ineptitude of his nurse to stay the bitter grip of decay.

Still she saw him. And every time she saw him her throat felt a little thick, and the grumblings of her invalid for the time being grew rather more irksome than usual. And, oddly enough, after a sight of Jock, Miss Charteris frequently found it a little difficult to say her prayers in the right spirit. She felt unthankful in

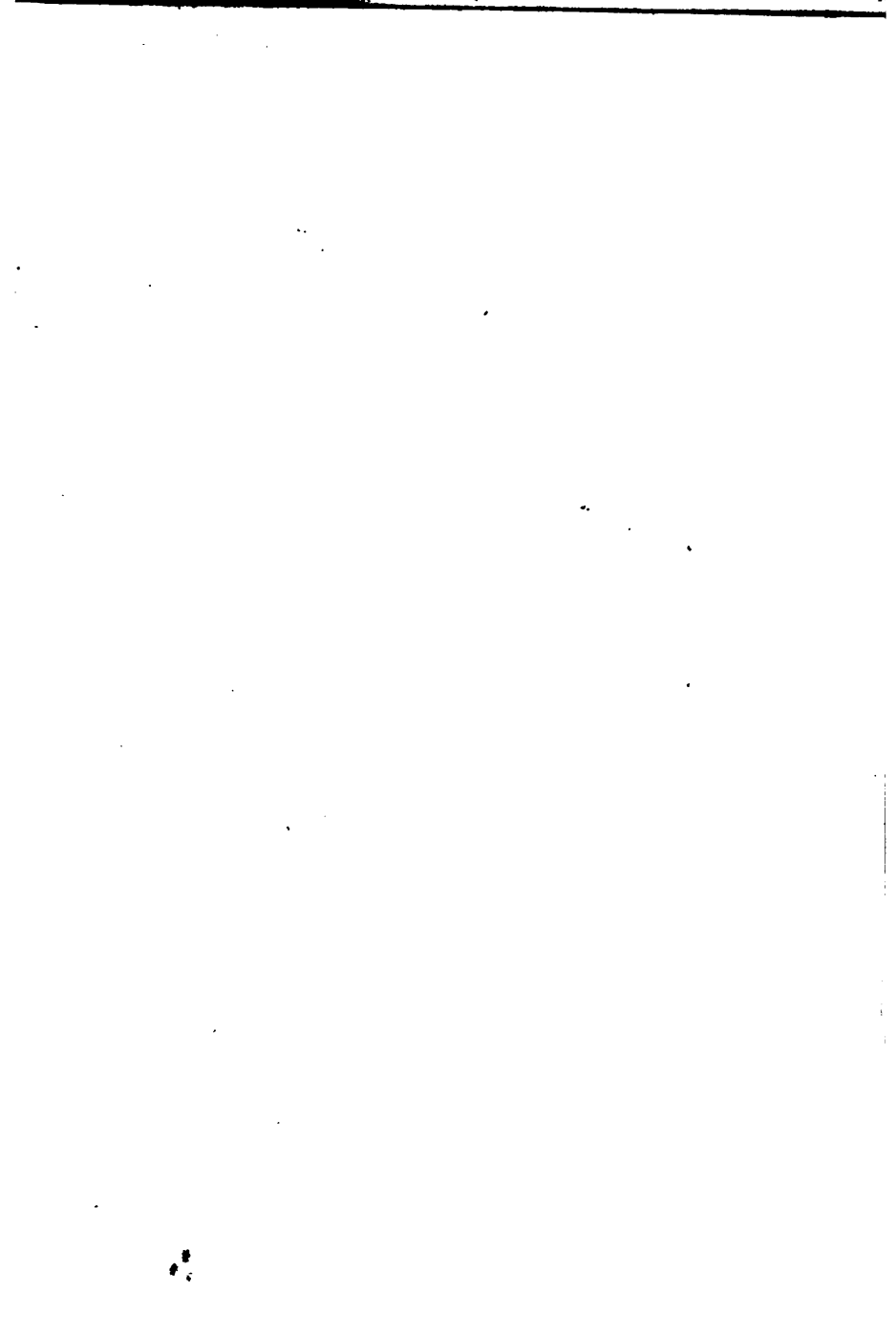
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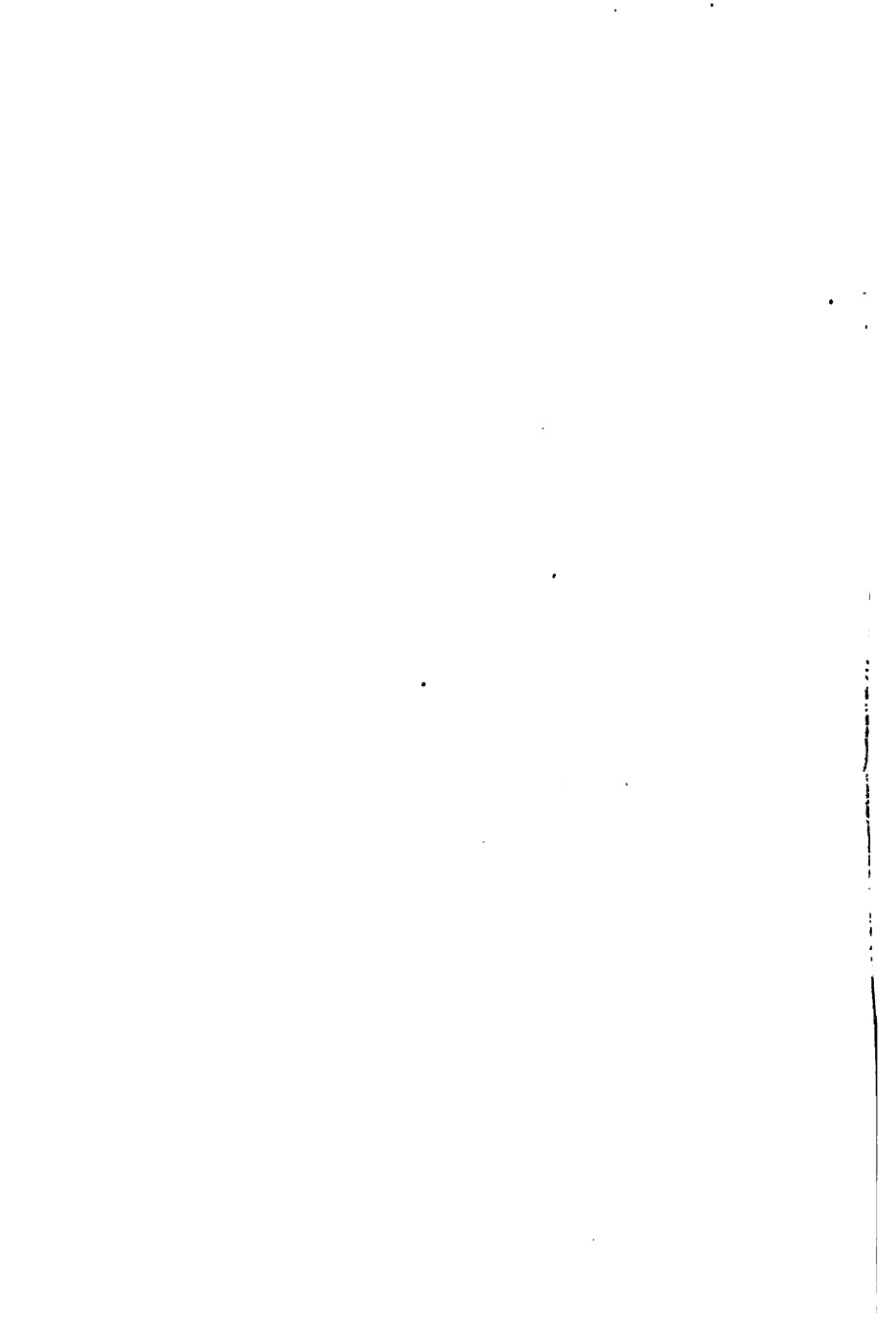


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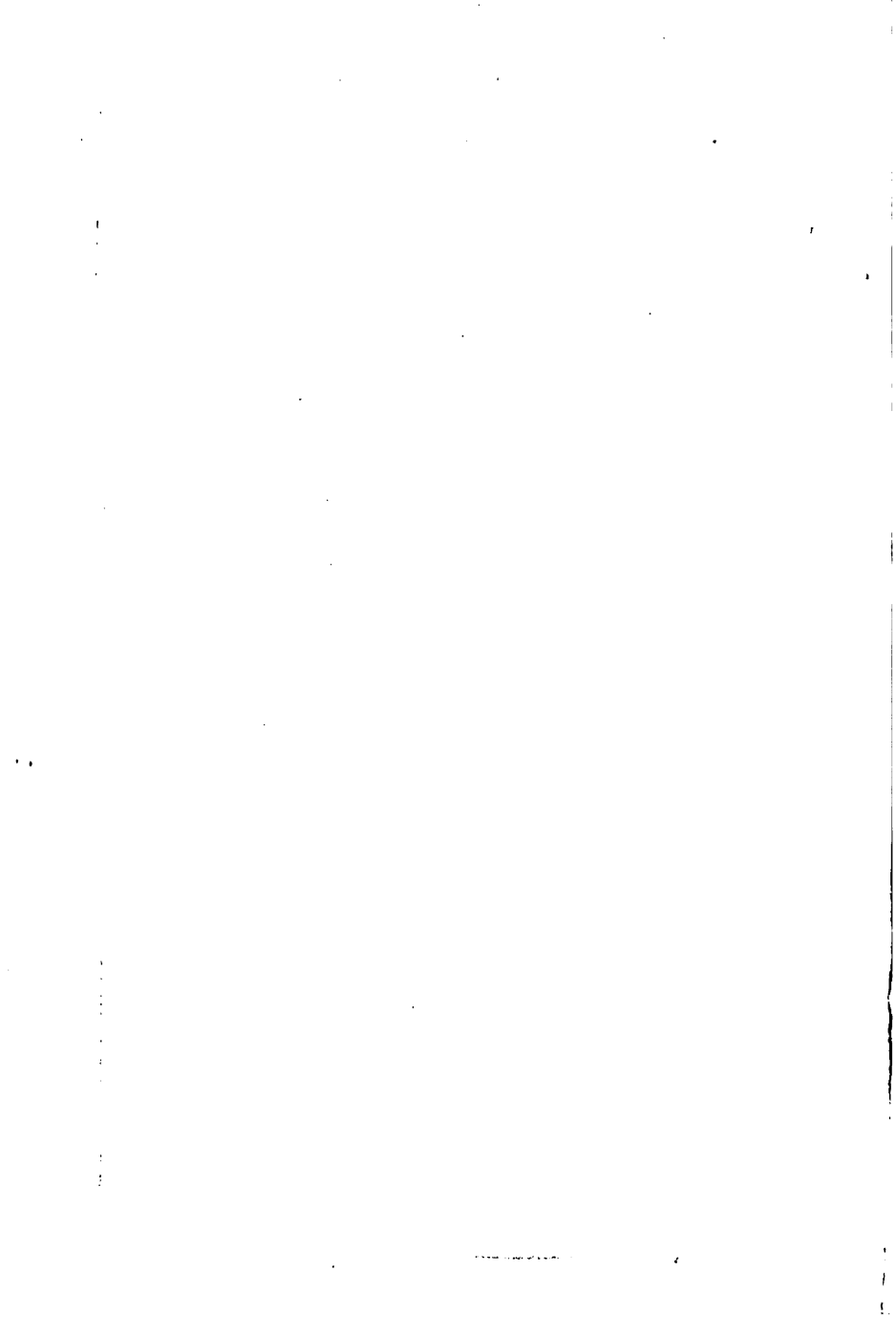
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THE MINX



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the neighbours, and the state of the scent, Mr. Hallows drifted adroitly into sport in foreign parts. Jock having once spent some two months at a Bavarian shooting lodge, had much to say in favour of the boar.

"I can't agree with you at all. The sight of a foreigner going to hunt makes me thank God that I'm an Englishman," said his father at last, after a patient hearing. "To me there's always something theatrical in these boars kept for show—many brutes, too, the half of 'em. And look at French partridges!" He ruffled the leaves of Hegel absently and coughed. "Still, however you may object to their customs and manufactures and general obnoxiousness," he continued, blandly, "those Germans have a way of getting to the root of the matter. Now here with us you'll find Nature being cracked up to the skies in every tuppenny-halfpenny rag you pick up. It's a sort of sop to the pompous insular conscience, and sweetens a man in his own nostrils. But it's the wrong end of the stick to take hold of, my boy. Before you can expect to get any good out of either man or nature, you'll have to stop bowing and scraping to ideal sketches of either, and look them square in the eye. 'Man is evil by nature,' says Hegel. Catch *him* fooling round with compliments! And it's an error to suppose that he could ever be otherwise. In short, Jock, Nature's as unsound as a medlar, and what you fellows with the reformer's spirit in you have to do is to better and not belaud her. Once begin at that game, and Heaven alone knows what you'll come to excuse, not only in regard to others, but in yourself. Shun cocksure charity as you would the devil, and as the very bed-rock of all knowledge, just remember this incontestable fact, 'Man is evil by nature.'"

"What's the matter with him?" said Jock, helping himself to honey. "After all, you'll find a lot more good chaps about than rotters, if you look for 'em. And even rotters have their points—be all right, the half of 'em, poor devils, if they knew how."

"Wait till you know a few women," groaned the Squire.

"As it happens, I do—several."

"They know you, I have no doubt—know you down to the ground—read you off like a little book. That's another story altogether! But till some minx has played the deuce with you, my lad, you know nothing of anything, least of all of woman."

"But even to undergo this necessary discipline presupposes some preliminary acquaintance with the instruments of grace," pleaded Jock.

"Oh, does it? I tell you, on the contrary, that the acquaintance doesn't begin until the education is practically at an end."

"By Jove, then, it's a poor lookout," said Jock, with a laugh, as he stood up.

"You—you doddering giant—you!" muttered his father.

"Feeling as you do, sir, it's a wonder——"

"Good Lord! as if the cases had anything in common. As if I had anything to do with—ahem!—superfluous industry about unprofitable things! I married, Jock, solely and entirely to escape the viperous tongues of women."

"Oh!" said Jock.

"I," pursued the Squire, "had threshed out the question years ago, and had arrived at last at a clear outlook. I won't say easily," said Anthony, meekly.

"These things try the nerves, but, thank Heaven, now for many years past," he interposed, conscientiously, "not a minx living has had it in her power to cajole me with her instep, much less her eyebrow. I know, however, when a woman goes 'civilly and decently.' And, Jock, that's the rub! Keep your head cool and your eye clear, and strive after sanity. It's really as easy as A B C," he pursued, with a pitiful glance at Jock, "and Heaven knows you have warnings and examples enough to guide you. What are the classics for, I'd like to know? Why, even if a fellow has only just managed to scrape through school and college by the skin of his teeth, if he's learnt nothing else, he must have picked up enough in regard to the pernicious results

of unreason in this confounded business to keep him, anyway, near the right track. And there are always Solomon and the prophets for the illiterate to fall back upon. And yet, in spite of it all, what even in this practical age do we see? Thousands of fools floundering down blindfold into the pit always because of some woman! Gad! It's a depraved altitude for a sane man."

"It's certainly an uncommon rum one," said Jock, cheerfully.

"Pah!" said the Squire. Jock paused for a moment to ascertain if there was anything further to come, then turned to surprise a broad ripple of laughter in the eyes of his little step-mother who, standing in the doorway, with a look of marked intelligence, was glancing from his father to him.

In so confirmed a saint the phenomenon was interesting. It occupied Jock, in starts, until he got to the stables.

"Look at him," said the Squire, when a few minutes later he rode past the windows. "Just see the way he sits his horse. And to think of a fellow like that being prey for the horse-leech!"

"He's wonderfully healthy," said Cecilia, grasping intuitively the dire significance of her husband's metaphor. "And look at his back."

"Back! What's back against seven devils?"

"Indeed, Anthony," said his wife, with spirit, "I think it's a great deal."

"What! With prize-fighters ruling the roost? And what rules the taste of a nation, I'd like to ask you, but its women? Why, even you—bless my soul, Cecilia, your eyes are like diamonds!"

"Mayn't I be proud of your son, Anthony?" He stared at her, for the moment speechless.

"Indeed, ma'am, I'm much obliged to you. But—but when, even at your age—why, can't you see that the unfortunate fellow hasn't a chance among the lot of you?"

"My dear Anthony, won't you eat your breakfast?"

"Can't we let men live, and love," she said presently, in her quiet way, "and leave the rest with God?"

The Squire looked perplexed, and paused to consider.

"'Pon my word, Cecilia, I'd hardly like to say off-hand. It's a difficult question, and one to be approached with awe and reverence. There are so many responsibilities involved in the pernicious business. You see," said Anthony, "there's Nature and the Almighty, to say nothing of the devil. At the same time," he added, with increasing confidence, "I'm hanged if a parent oughtn't to have some say in the matter, considering that he himself has been through the same mill!"

"Hem!" said his wife, in the most impersonal way in the world.

"He has himself fought and overcome," pushed on Anthony, unswervingly. "Surely, therefore, he above all others has the first right to—to——"

"Yes, dear," said Cecilia, soothingly, "to warn."

"My dear Cecilia, this contradictory mood is quite unlike you. It is surely only reasonable to suppose that the counsel and guidance of one who has for many years watched life may possibly save a young and untried boy something of the bitterness of experience—but since all this might be a dead and buried language to inexperience, it's scarce worth while to pursue the subject."

Meanwhile Jock had gone down the lime-tree path that flanked the gardens by the paddock where stood the wide pheasant boxes. He had crossed the clump of pines set thick and close to shelter the old house from the winds that came screeching down from the northern hills, and was out on the great stretch of avenue that ran its erratic, headlong course up and down sharp spurs of hills, through odd, inconsequent patches of woodland, across little sudden, unexpected quaint bridges that spanned the wayward stream, which in its turn ran in and out like a May dance in its breathless effort to tarry longer in this pleasant home. For never yet came thing or creature to Faldeholm but was loth to leave it.

Jock pulled up on the last rise to look back over the wide sweep of country, half moor, half park-lands, that

wrapped round the home of his fathers. The breezy, sturdy carelessness of the scene was magnificent in its way. It caught him in its spell and held him as it did all the other myriad young life born and bred on the place. No one in his senses could be anything else but a boy in that southerly breeze, and all the land throbbing with life—fearless and friendly. The stumpy prize cattle, hardy as the soil that bred them, which the Squire set free on mild days, came up to stare in Jock's face; the browsing deer scarce lifted their heads at sight of him; a mob of half-tamed ponies—another uncompleted experiment of Anthony's—sauntered up in token of recognition; and every nest and every hole in all the woods and waters where the brooding and dreaming things lay waiting for the spring call, were all known to Jock. They had all grown up together, those young creatures.

But if Jock was boy, he was also man; and now there welled up in his heart the queer motherliness which at some odd moment in his life a strong man will feel when he looks out over his own acres—that little handful of hill and dale handed over to him by generations of kindly, land-loving forbears who won their rights, we can only hope, fairly, but won them, at any rate, by the might of the strong arm!

Whether by straightness or strength, however, they are now an integral, ingrained part of the children's children of the winner, and over them a man can be as glad and as heart-sick as was ever pink-faced woman over her little child.

There was in Jock that moment in which he paused upon the crest of the hill in the sweet southerly breeze a most odd jumble of sensations. A glint of reverence may have slipped in unawares with the rest, for by some unaccountable impulse he took his hat off and wondered if it would be as easy to go straight in the future as it had always been in the past.

This was Jock's real home-coming, his first step across the threshold of his new life.

Until he had come out into the pleasant winds he had

been feeling as sore that morning as a healthy man just going to hunt has it in him to feel, for the day before he had suffered the second bad wrench of his life.

The first bad parting in a boy's life had touched Jock but little, for since there had been no mother in his home, there had been no sting in leaving it. All that was to come.

It had called for more pluck than he had possessed four years before to leave Rugby dry-eyed. After a glorious six years in a place with every one in it your friend, and a story in each stone and in all the leaves of all the trees, it comes hard to say good-bye. He remembered how bitterly ashamed he had been when he broke down that last morning in chapel, but now he knew that it would have been more extraordinary still if he had not done something out of the way. Yet this was nothing to the surprising grief of yesterday.

Jock had never bothered about popularity at Oxford. It had come just as it had at Rugby.

And since he had lived every minute in every hour from the time he could walk, he had always found everything worth while—play, work even, but above all friends—it was hardly to be wondered at that he should have found it difficult to turn his back forever upon a place which held pretty nearly all the things a man can want.

It was impossible to accept without protest the fact that he was cut clean out of the daily life of a community whereof, for four years, he had been integral part and parcel.

It was vile to know, even dimly, that the place would get on just as well as though he had never, from every point of view, been absolutely essential to its progress. Jock put on his hat, took another look at his old home, and feeling more stable thereby, he rode on thinking of his friends and the unequalled times they had had together.

To judge by the sort of things that a few philosophers and several humourists dig out in regard to their fellows, Jock may possibly have idealised man, for everything he brought to light about him was pleasant to the

eye and fragrant to the nostrils. But he had never idealised woman. He had merely left her alone.

For purposes of convenience, indeed, he had put her aside in two sections.

First, the sporting woman—a poor sort of thing; frequently a bad imitation, and hard to deal with upon straightforward, common-sense lines, since you could not possibly point out to her wherein she went wrong.

Secondly, the other woman, who interfered with sport.

When later, at the end of the last run, he found himself, by feminine craft, landed in a room full of women, Jock caught sight of one upon a distant sofa who surprised him. She fitted in with neither of his feminine generalisations. He set her metaphorically upon a stool by herself and paused in a window, beside a hunting type of a violent character, to look at her. An aloof and impersonal study of the new variety was quite good enough for Jock; he proposed no further advances. But his hostess, a woman of some quickness and immense vigour, had perceived his glance, and being only too anxious to catch hold of any one so eminently qualified to talk rationally to her niece—in these remote parts an unsolved problem, for whom intellectual communion must at all costs be provided—she bore rapidly down upon Jock, and before he could elude her, he found himself enwrapped in a mist of adjectives remotely connected with the classics, together with her niece's fearsome intimacy with them.

Jock wondered mildly why on earth a poor little girl couldn't be permitted to learn a trifle of Latin and some Greek without throwing all her feminine relatives into convulsions.

In his sympathetic stare he discovered that what had engaged his attention at the outset was not the glory of the girl's hair, or the brightness of her eyes. Most of them, so far as he knew, had good hair, and their eyes seemed right enough. It was a curious, ungentle eagerness in her that struck him. A restless, reaching-out sort of look. She was vivid all over. Luminous, seem-

ingly, inside and out. Throbbing to be at something. Jock gasped in unostentatious silence. He felt sorry for the little thing. She must be experiencing a constant and uninterrupted succession of electric shocks. That sort of thing would wear out a cart-horse, and this creature was as slight and delicate as a racer. Jock experienced an irresistible impulse to "gentle" her. He felt an uncomfortable conviction that, if this stored electric force were let loose, it would play the devil with the poor little thing's manners.

"You're not riding to-day?" said he, in a sympathising tone.

"Riding to hounds? Oh, no!"

There was a certain half-nervous menace in her glance, the first he had ever seen in a woman's eyes. Jock felt uneasy. There must be something wrong about himself. To be conscious of himself at all was so new a sensation that the young man felt startled.

"It's been a glorious morning," said he, "and the runs were short. I believe you'd have enjoyed it."

"I hardly think so," said she, with contained resentment.

"There's so little to do this time of year," said Jock, watching her with a sort of unwilling fascination, "that unless you hunt, I'm afraid you'll find the country dull."

"Dull! with so much that might be done for it!"

Jock felt annihilated, yet more anxious than ever to smooth her down.

Suddenly she looked up at him and began to be terribly perplexed. His head might be empty, considering his pursuits—it probably was. What, after all, were university distinctions? Any one could learn Greek, and mathematics only needed a little time. He might be a sanguinary brute, and there was no doubt at all as to his being idle and a wastrel.

But he looked kind and—immense, she admitted, shamefacedly.

She glanced hurriedly around her. She was accustomed to stings from a singular variety of small drawing-room shafts faithfully thrown. But the room was lively

with pink coats, and the women's eyes all beamed charity.

For a proud and independent person with an exalted sense of her own responsibility and the perquisites of her sex, Joyce harboured a craven dread of its tendency to misconstrue. This possibly may have arisen from inexperience.

"Do you really believe that people who think, or have the capacity to think," she said, a little precipitately, "can find any true enjoyment in hunting?"

"Oh, well," admitted Jock, meekly, "you wouldn't exactly choose the hunting-field to do your deep thinking in; but men of quite average intelligence, I assure you, find in it an agreeable relaxation."

She took another glance at him. There was something about him that reminded her of a screen. You can say anything from behind a screen. Besides, it hurt her to think that any one with a face so rational as his should be given over, without some one's protest, to trifling and blood-thirsty barbarism.

"Isn't it rather a conservative, sheep-like prompting to follow the—the herd? Like the other crazes which make sensible people do senseless things, rush to a dozen balls the same night, for example, and crush themselves and the flowers to death on staircases, race from one tea party to another." She flushed, he looked bigger than ever, and her similes sounded callow. She must plunge—"or lounge in clubs having drinks all day?"

"I don't know much about that sort of thing myself," said Jock, modestly. "But I confess to finding hunting an excellent tonic."

"A tonic! To kill a poor little panting fox!"

"We don't always kill," he pleaded.

"But you always want to."

Jock never remembered to have heard a sweeter voice, and the little thrill in it made it only the sweeter, yet all the time her eyes were snapping viciously up into his. There was something straight and honest in the snap, however, and the eye were like green-grey moss. That a girl can slay you with her eyes and caress you with her

voice, seemed to Jock an engaging anomaly. In turning these matters over, he neglected to reply to her.

This, considering her age, was annoying.

"It's cruel, barbarous, trivial!" she decided, aloud and finally.

By this time he was anxious to meet her views, without tampering to any serious extent with his own.

"It's very developing," he ventured, gravely.

"To what?"

"Oh, well, to the muscles."

Perceiving instantaneously that flippancy hurt her severely, he hedged. "To—to health generally, you know. The health of a nation depends upon the health of its units. Hunting's excellent training for man and beast. It raises the status—of farming. It gives employment."

"I see," she said, sadly. "If men must brutalise themselves, there are other physical developers. There are exercisers. Surely physical culture has never been so developed as it is now. There are gymnasiums everywhere——"

"Oh," murmured Jock, feebly.

"There's cricket," she said, hurriedly, "and football."

"But these things," he explained, apologetically, "not only brutalise, sometimes they kill."

"Men take the risk open-eyed."

"So does the fox, in a way. He's no child, at least. Think of the experience he's gathered on his midnight prowls. Look at his moral character!"

"Oh! as to that!" said Joyce. With an air of premature wisdom, she lifted her innocent eyes to Heaven.

In trying to say something appropriate, Jock chuckled inaudibly.

Miss Anstiss flushed and rose, and before he could put things right, Jock was absorbed by his hostess.

"I'm glad, my dear," said old Sir Harry Rawson, Joyce's uncle, "that you've had young Jock Hallows to talk to. With his knowledge all raw upon him—you know he did great things at Oxford—I dare say you found a lot in common to yarn about. What was the

subject of your conversation, my dear girl?" said this inconvenient old man, garrulously.

Had it been possible for Joyce to tell lies, most thankfully would she have told a dozen on the spot. But it was altogether impossible. Her mind was far too proud and stiff.

"Foxes," she said, calm with despair.

"Foxes!" Sir Harry's voice rang with sincere disappointment. "Foxes? Why, God bless my soul! any fool could have talked to you about foxes."

But Joyce was already half-way up the stairs, three steps at a time, and there was a little catch in her throat.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN some twenty years before Sir Harry Rawson's madcap sister had, upon a sudden impulse, married a curate with views, her friends put the calamity down to a slight inconsequence apparent in her behaviour dating from the day upon which she had jilted Dunstan of the Blues. Whatever the cause, Dorothy was carried off triumphantly to wilt and wither in a fetid atmosphere of good works in a Midland factory town. There for many patient years did she shed, one by one, the delights of her youth, and imbibe a philanthropy which left her cold. There was too much of the curate's liver in it for Dorothy's taste.

She endured it in a lady-like way, however, and bore many children—little, sickly, faint-hearted creatures mostly, who shirked life. All but one, a sturdy, kicking infant, who faced it conscientiously, and in spite of the forbidding murk, a philanthropy fuller of science than of heart, and a sad-eyed mother, grew lovely and silver-tongued.

Her father, who had literally scooped up honours at Oxford, early discovered in Joyce a passion for the absorption of knowledge—the only passion of which he had any conception, or for which he could find any tolerance. Thereupon, with an enthusiasm singularly at variance with his methods of teaching the Gospel, he forgot his liver and sat down diligently to till the little seething brain.

Joyce, who found in the great tomes he set before her her first glimpse of the true romance, followed her father breathless in and out the Pagan authors, and from amongst them she snatched the colour, the warmth and light, the gorgeousness, the full, excellent music of the life her own dull days so grievously lacked.

But her mother, having no sweet Pagan singers to

relieve for her the oppressive monotony of a conjugal liver—gnawing regret having long ago driven hope from its holding—one day she permitted the devastating dullness of life to blot her out. And Joyce, her eyes wet with her first tears, staggered back from heroical dreamings to live amongst “men who groan,” to register the changes in her father’s liver, and preside at his philanthropic meetings.

In her enchanted wanderings through the inconsequent past, Joyce had made the acquaintance of many gods, and neither they nor their works had ever to any appreciable depth either thrilled or touched her. Their behaviour to mortals seemed to her very scandalous, and a little mean.

Still they were active, alive, intelligent persons, and, in their way, magnificent. They dealt with large concerns, and generally got what they wanted. Thus, although she deplored their methods, she admired their success.

There was a power of ambition gathering force daily in Joyce’s little soul, and she loved bigness.

When torn from her brilliant dreams and brought face to face with the colourless, bloodless death-in-life in her father’s dim church—bereft of beauty, memories and hope—God a lonely abstraction brooding above men who forgot Him in their pews below—Joyce’s untender Pagan young heart began to dissect things out. She fell to listen amazed to the commonplaces of her father, falling dully from the varnished deal pulpit. The mere thought of her father’s face as he uttered them, of the faces of his congregation as it strove to sleep or kill time by totting up the minor expenses of the current week, kept her awake for three nights. Upon the fourth, being farther than ever from any satisfactory solution to the mystery, Joyce jumped out of bed, threw on her ugly little grey dressing-gown, and ran down barefooted to the study. Here her father, with a beatific countenance, was reading.

Joyce knelt down beside him, threw her shapeless young arm across the beguiling page, and implored the astonished gentleman then and there to renounce the

priesthood and embark forthwith upon some honest trade. The appalled, uncomprehending distress upon her father's face, when at last her meaning stood out clear before him, held Joyce spellbound. She took no notice whatsoever of his arguments, his pathetic protest. His face was enough for her. It spoke the truth. There were tears in his eyes, red and bleared through midnight reading under the heavy gas-light. His sad lips trembled.

Next day he had a severe liver attack. The liver of Mr. Anstiss was of the purely neurotic type, and depended upon circumstances. Therefore was Joyce fully confirmed in her primary conviction. His mental pain of the previous night had been as poignant as it had seemed to be.

There was in this matter a deeper depth of truth than she could grasp. So she continued to go to church diligently, and did her best not to contrast the cold, emotionless face and voice that confounded her in all the holy offices of a holy church with the radiant visage which in unsanctified moments read Aristotle or the voice that rolled out beloved staves of Æschylus, while her faith in the unswerving rigidity of the male purpose and point of view, already considerably shaken by a close intimacy with the classics, became permanently unhinged.

It was a positive relief to turn from the disheartening indeterminateness of unapplied Christianity, as demonstrated in the church of St. Nicholas in the Holt, to the sublime if somewhat ferocious and one-eyed earnestness of the young men connected with the humanitarian, progressive movements of the factory town.

These young men were one and all rigid with enthusiasm. They were stern in purpose, steadfast in pursuing, and possessed of a strenuous and touching faith in the immaculateness of their own methods. And although they might so far have failed to move mountains, yet in the matter of sanitary and other reforms they had managed at least to break down very considerable hills.

For long months Joyce looked upon an electrical engineer as quite the most staunch and truth-pursuing object in nature, and she worked with him, side by side, and

always at racing pace. For, lest she might be tempted to reflect upon his collar, she dared not pause. Despite her sex and her trials, Joyce had a scrupulous mind and the *esprit-de-corps* of a born fighter.

She was therefore jealous for the honour of her fellow-soldier. She could have wished that some of his minor details were otherwise. But these being inevitable—since they were all fighting for the same cause, all striving upward together—the least she could do was to think as little of paltry trivialities as might be. She found by practical experiment that her best remedy against dwelling censoriously upon the form of her coworker was to keep her eyes firmly fixed upon his aim. This somehow made the human instrument more indistinct.

Happily for Joyce, perhaps, in the matter of the Higher Criticism, her eye had not yet reached its apotheosis, her taste in beards and neckties being as yet rather of intuition than of experience.

And so with orthodox religion undergoing rigorous tests in her little stubborn heart, being weighed and found wanting in her elemental, vigilant, restless brain, Joyce's devout spirit was following ardently in the sacred footsteps out amongst His poor in the flaming darkness of the great city nearer home, striving ever after tolerance for outrageous and most ungraspable anomalies.

And, oddly enough, this was, of the two, the more difficult matter.

And then this preternaturally grave and earnest little girl, seething with aims, and with a starved heart, who had not begun to learn to laugh, and knew not the nature of the mocking spirit, was plunged one day sheer into the midst of a crowd of fox-hunting relatives, savoured, fleetingly, with a little cynical salt from the great world of London.

For the liver of Cuthbert Anstiss overstepped its bounds at last, and he found himself forced to convey it to some healing but expensive resort in Austria, and for lack of funds to carry her with him, to consign Joyce to the care of kinsfolk, cast off now for a score or so of years.

For, being a proud man, Cuthbert had taken the initiative in the matter of the casting off. And later, when it was made clear to him that Dorothy's kindly kin had no desire to discard him, save temporarily, by way of a lesson, having retired to his shell with his books, he preferred to remain there, more especially since he saw his wife growing dull-eyed, and realised, after a misty fashion, that the cause lay, if not with him exactly, yet in some incomprehensible way with his estate and his excruciating distempers.

Naturally, therefore, part of him after all being but human, he harboured a good deal of subacute resentment against a family, one of whose bright members—because of him of all people in the world!—was fading out defeated.

It was not until acute illness had weakened, and perhaps also softened him, that Mr. Anstiss gave way at last to Lady Rawson's representations and sent his daughter to her reorganising care.

Joyce arrived, beaming with hope and deferred affection, but without a dinner-dress.

The omission was swiftly noticed and delicately repaired. For old Sir Harry's wife, although she had spent most of her time for twenty years past pottering about the village, and herself preferred bunchy little gowns and a mushroom hat, yet knew well what the dignity of a girl demanded, and had nice ways.

Joyce did not suffer at all in being put right by Lady Rawson, and an evening dress was a revelation.

She gasped a little indeed when first she beheld herself stripped for sacrifice, but the delicate-moulded white innocence that confronted her soon reassured her.

It was being put right by other girls that made Joyce wince.

She stood aghast and helpless in the face of flippancy. Gay inconsequence made her tremble. Idleness hurt her like a blow.

She realised swiftly that with purpose, opinion, and principles to uphold, therein lies tragedy.

And so she grew more grave and earnest than ever.

And presently from her immense shyness and a yearning to be of some use in a world humming with abuses, was born the unhappy little imp, Aggressiveness. And but for the sweetness of her voice and her reassuring dimples, Joyce would have been hated of every man in the house, whilst it was only her unconcealed distrust of unemployed, aimless man, with her detestation of his chosen pursuits, that rescued her from the enmity of woman.

The young of both sexes did vastly worse than hate her, however; they chaffed her delicately.

Joyce was finding wit worse than scorpions. When first discovered upon the sofa by Jock Hallows, she had just been recovering from a severe encounter with it.

Something about Jock helped to heal the wounds. It even encouraged her to take him to task about the foxes.

In her new and amazing environments Joyce had been generally forced, in sheer self-defence, into upholding her principles.

To advance them unattacked was but a token of the confidence engendered within her by the rumours of Jock's attainments and the look of his square head and stable shoulders. Joyce did her best to leave out his tie and the unequalled cut of his pink coat.

A man with such a reputation, whose appearance—she accepted the pink with a gulp—so properly fitted it, must obviously have longings and aspirations above the herd.

Somewhere about him surely he must have a soul designed by Nature to serve humanity, wipe out prejudices, and destroy national institutions. He could not be wholly wrapped up in foxes. He must ultimately be preserved for imperial concerns.

There was a promise about this young man she had failed to detect in any of the others. He was, in short, a brand to be plucked from the depraving effects of idleness and brutal pursuits. He excited all Joyce's young enthusiasm.

And then that amongst these grave issues he could somewhere have found a joke!

Little wonder that impious laugh should have sent Joyce, panting, to her room.

CHAPTER IV.

HAVING floundered into a somewhat too obvious fallacy, and perceiving from an expression in Cecilia's delicate eyebrow that she was pensively aware of it, Anthony's jaw dropped.

But since it was in no sort of way his custom to admit to any confounding of his by the feminine understanding, he recovered himself on the spot and continued fluently.

"Oh, woman's not an idealist, then! Well, for the sake of argument, we'll grant so much. If she's not an idealist, however, she's worse. She's the disastrous result of a confused compound. When dealing with others, an idealist. When dealing with herself, an incoherent experimentalist.

"Never, mark you, does she carry out her experiments with a logical regard to any ultimate, definite issue. Logical induction isn't her tap, bless you! But she enjoys paddling in emotions, and her own being the only ones of which she has any knowledge, naturally she turns the microscope upon her own breast and generalises upon the result!

"A consuming despondency being naturally the result of her investigations, there follows the inevitable reaction. She must, therefore, being always anxious to have her finger in every pie, find means to restore the balance, to reconcile the apparent chaos of infinity with the demands of a retail conscience, a housewifely instinct for order, for neat effects, polished surface. A woman likes to see herself in all God's works! All this, coupled with a nice taste in millinery, literally plunges her sheer into idealism. With equal cheerfulness, she'll bedizen a man or mouse. And, Lord help us!" groaned Anthony, "she's as idyllic—in another sort of way, to be sure—

about our vices as she is about our virtues! Woman is incapable of looking Nature square in the eye."

"To come nearer home, I wish my taste for millinery," said Mrs. Hallowes, demurely, with a furtive, anxious little glance at Jock, buried in the paper, "would enable me to drape the drains in Vicarage-lane, so as effectually to conceal their abominations."

"There you are, flying off on a tangent again. I doubt if there's any one subject too sacred for a woman to bring a microbe into. The truth is, Nature's methods are entirely too simple for you, too unpolished, too just and cruel. So in order to plane down things to your own conceptions of what's right and proper, off you start upon the theory racket. The village is full of puling, puking girls. And why?"

"Oh, Anthony."

Anthony waved his hand and pushed on.

"It isn't microbes, I can assure you. It's d—— ahem!—confounded impudent pride. They're too soaked in board-school drivel! Microbes! Good Lord! set 'em up with microbes!—to live in the way Nature meant 'em to. Their mothers and grandmothers before them walked barefoot two miles out and two back to strip the turnips on the farms, to pick potatoes and drop seeds, and what did they know about microbes? They had cheeks like a July apple, and backs as straight as a larch. The present-day misses wear tight kid shoes to hide the holes in their stockings, and, for the life of 'em, wouldn't soil their fine fingers with an honest root. The very last day I was out with the hounds I saw half a dozen of 'em—measly-faced, bow-backed weeds—with their indecent heels glaring out of their Brummagem stockings. (Anthony prided himself upon his close observation of detail.) And the way their mothers and grandmothers knitted! Why, ma'am, they'd beat you hollow!"

"But, Anthony——"

"My dear Cecilia, must you always be interrupting? And what's the consequence? Waiting for some genteel occupation, the idle hussies sit at home sniffing drains—confound their impudence! Stewing by the fire, spoiling

the complexions the Almighty gave them, and imbibing a literature—save the mark!—to which, Cecilia,”—the Squire paused solemnly—“any microbe yet invented is but as a sucking dove! Has it never struck you,” said Mr. Hallowes, with a sagacious, amused smile, “that these drains that you’re bothering your head over stood very much as they do now in my grandfather’s time?”

“It has indeed struck me quite forcibly,” said Cecilia, looking as meek as she could. “I don’t, however, suppose that they mattered so much then, dear Anthony. The people were sturdy, undeveloped creatures who lived in the open air, and food was cheap.”

“Undeveloped creatures! And is it the development of the race you’re hinting at—you, who’ve had time to see the nation going slick to the devil? ’Pon my soul, Cecilia, you surprise me! A sensible woman of your age! Leave mawkish charity of that order, my dear, to the lunatic asylums and cackling ’Varsity whippersnappers, with shoulders like hock bottles.”

Jock looked up hastily. The future of England was upon them. The time to intervene had obviously arrived. Until this urgent moment he had found it more amusing to permit the odd charm of the little girl, whom the day before he had sent marching up and down her room to deplore his depravity, to run in and out amongst the morning news. He was, however, not so engrossed in his subject but he could notice upon the part of his step-mother a tentative glance flung once or twice upon himself. His intelligence, a slight trammelling of sentiment notwithstanding, was alert enough. He was fully awake still to the new Mrs. Hallowes’ diffident sampling of him, and put it down to her saintly profession. She was probably taking notes upon his soul. And this but shows how little even intelligent man knows of those who love him!

In Cecilia’s first intimate study of a young man, she had wisely set soul aside until heart and brain and a woman with the pain she brings should have given it its bent, and occupied herself solely with the minor things. She found these quite sufficiently absorbing.

To look calm-eyed into a man's clean, fresh young heart is a pleasant pastime for an old woman grown tired with hearing from sour lips of the desperate iniquities which devastate the hearts of those unhappy enough to possess them.

In the circumstances Cecilia had done better, perhaps, to observe the heart of Anthony. But she felt that that simple organ called for no nice discrimination. Even had it done so once, now it stood aloof, with her own, out of the strife and storm, sheltered from the great winds, in an "even clime"—the beautiful, intimate, personal hopes all dead, the mistakes all made, the fears assuaged, the tears dried, the wounds healed, the fires expended; all the wild yearnings, the mad imaginings, the swift-soaring dreams, with stripped wings, come home to rest.

Being a woman, and used to vicarious enjoyment, Cecilia was quite content to sit, gentle, still, and tender, hand in hand with Anthony, behind them the finished banquet of life, so long as she could watch Jock drink of the wine of his banquet, but just begun, and eat of its dishes.

And perhaps some day, when the pain of his first disillusion should have dulled his palate and clouded his mind, she might help him to reject the evil and choose the good.

Meanwhile there would be plenty of little things she might have the delight of suggesting to Jock,—just as though she were his real mother.

But the one thunderbolt which lay waiting in her unwilling palm to be levelled at the boy, in thinking of all the other things, Cecilia had almost forgotten.

"By the way, sir," said Jock, "old Jonathan Trew says he means to wire-fence in the whole of Simon's Hollow."

The Squire dropped Woman like a hot coal, and snorted. And forthwith the conversation ranged its cheerful course from Trew's unexampled impiety to the latest blatant pandering to the spirit of the age in the case of Jobson who, at the recent meeting of Guardians, had proposed to wipe out the last remnant of manhood

left by indiscreet pampering to the pauper, through the application to his unregenerate carcass of a spring-bed.

Whereupon Anthony, feeling exhausted, picked up Burton and retired to his study.

Jock, on his part, was sauntering off to the stables, when something in Mrs. Hallowes' attitude arrested his attention.

A saint's reputation hampers a woman in more ways than one. It renders her so very liable to be regarded rather in the light of a devotional picture. Cecilia still made this impression upon Jock—a pleasant, delicate work of art indeed, that he liked to have about the house. It scattered a sort of old-fashioned fragrance, and promoted domestic felicity, inasmuch as it caused the son to think well of the father's skill in selection.

But now, as he went out, it struck him that the little picture looked lonely. This was a sort of thing that always stumped Jock.

He turned back, plumped down opposite the little lady, and took up her sock.

"Rather gay for the old man, isn't it?"

"But I was making it for you."

"For me, were you! By Jove, that's really awfully good of you now! It's a beautiful sock. You can't buy things like that in the shops. I suppose you've made a lot of them in your time?"

"Of these?" She touched the soft scarlet silk curiously. "No; this is my first pair. I have made an incredible number of bed-socks, though. I think I have exhausted every known knitting stitch upon bed-socks; so don't be afraid; these will be quite perfect."

Jock laughed. Then he felt a sudden awe of a woman who had spent all her years in the manufacture of bed-socks. It was a queer history of a woman's life.

His step-mother was suddenly wondering why she had never happened to make any baby-socks. She was the only old maid of whom she had heard who had omitted this integral portion of the single lady's existence. She tried to remember whether or not the omission had been voluntary, but concluded that it must have been for

want of time. All her work would naturally have gone to ward the cold of death from off some old feet.

"And when these are finished," said Jock, in his engaging way, "you'll make me a white silk tie, won't you?"

Cecilia said nothing, but her smile pleased Jock. He was beginning to like old women, rather.

"Would—would you care to smoke?"

"Smoke? What! here, among your flowers?"

"Smoking is good for flowers," said Saint Cecilia, guiltily. "It kills parasites. Your—your father—because of his gout, you know, is almost debarred from smoking."

"Oh! in that case," said Jock, indulgently. "But I thought——" He paused, with sudden recollection.

"You thought," said Cecilia, hurriedly, "that promiscuous smoking upset me. Formerly, when I was younger and much in hot rooms, it did a little. Now," said she, blatantly, "now I like it."

"But my father?" said the amused Jock.

"Oh, yes! Don't you see, it was most important that your father should give up the habit for a time, so I did not deny that I should prefer him to smoke in the smoking-room. Your father in all personal matters is most scrupulous and considerate. He at once gave in to my wish, and you know that he abhors the smoking-room."

"He is, however," she continued, modestly, "as you must see,—he is much better."

Jock grinned, genially.

"What makes those girls so pale?" he said, presently.

Of a sudden the thunderbolt got hot in Cecilia's hand, she dropped a stitch, and paused for an instant.

"The drains are poisonous," she said then, with simple directness, "and the girls have not quite enough to eat."

"But they work?"

"They try to. They get small situations, and soon lose them from incapacity. The poor harried mistress finds that she has merely multiplied her worries by the

importation of a 'lass,' and she has no time for patience, poor thing!"

"But there are big houses about."

"Oh, yes. Being rejected by the little ones, they try these, and the good food and the warmth and the new life are a little too much for the creatures. The kitten in them had no chance in their own homes, so amidst the unwonted luxury it comes up out of due season, with its claws rather overgrown, perhaps, and so they grow lazy and light and insubordinate, and naturally mistresses complain, and the lassies leave."

"Well, that sounds very like common-sense," said Jock, with a look at her. "You're not rabid then against board schools, are you?"

"I'm old-fashioned," she admitted. "I miss the little, bobbing heads all down the street, and the curtsies. Being weak creatures ourselves, within limits, unconditional weakness appeals to us. It gives us a sense of our own strength and importance, and induces us to loving-kindness perhaps. Ignorance stripped of its manners and just moved from its moorings by First and Second Readers has scarce so gentle an effect. It then becomes a Discipline, and," sighed Cecilia, "there are already so many Disciplines, that one grudges to add to their number."

"I see," said Jock, with another grin.

"At the same time," pursued Cecilia, "board schools seem to be less deleterious to the national character than drains."

Jock laughed, but he was jealous for every stick and stone in the place where he was born.

"It's such a jolly village," said he. "I don't know another like it. Really it's beautiful."

"You're young, and see only the beauty. It's a beautiful point of view," she said, wistfully. "I must have lost it long ago. To me no place can be beautiful where young lives are withering."

"Phew!" said Jock.

Saint Cecilia blushed up to the roots of her white hair. It struck her like a swift blow that, since it was just

thirty years since she had last conversed consecutively with a young man, perhaps she had forgotten his requirements, and bored Jock. The thunderbolt must wait. She put her knitting quickly in its bag, and rose quietly.

Jock stretched out a big detaining hand.

"Where are you off too? It's clear you've not got yet into our leisurely ways. There can't be anything very pressing to see to at this hour of day, and I want to talk to you. Look here, you have a discomposing way of putting things, you know. I have seen these withering damsels all over the place, ever since I could see at all, and till you mentioned it they never struck me as being out of the way—out of nature, you know."

"How could they?" she said, gently. "It would have been out of nature if you had noticed it. Your—your youth has absorbed all your time and thoughts."

"Well, that's a nice way of putting it. I've been hanged selfish, you mean."

"I don't think I do," she said, slowly. "But even if you have been selfish, there's surely time enough still in which to be unselfish."

"It hasn't struck my father, either."

"Men sometimes lose their habits of observation," said Cecilia, "when there's not some woman at hand to remind them of things. It's been too harassing a household for any man to remain quite clear-headed in, and just now with his gout——" Cecilia paused and looked at her stepson, perplexed. She was so ignorant as to how much a young man could stand at one sitting.

"So you waited for me?" said Jock, with a laugh.

Mrs. Hallowes flushed, and was silent.

"Oh, well," he said, easily, "now we've got you to remind us of things, I daresay they'll come right without much of a bother."

Mrs. Hallowes was composing with all her might a diplomatic speech, but suddenly she threw up the attempt, and went simply forward to the truth.

"At the risk of seeming officious, Jock, I must tell you something," said she, in her quietest voice. "It won't

be easy to get things right. It will be very difficult, for there is a great deal wrong."

"What——"

"And there is so little money," she said, in a low voice, looking down at her sock. "There's hardly any at all. There have been some mistakes made. When you find them out, you will soon—I can see that you go straight at things, and that you are accurate, and will therefore hate inaccuracy." She was miserably aware of Jock's start, but she went on courageously: "When you know everything—the muddle, the waste, the amazing disorder—your first impulse will be to judge harshly. You're so young."

There was an odd fear in the eyes that searched his face.

"Oh, how young you are!" she cried, "and it's hard for the young to forgive a fault they can't understand."

"What on earth do you mean, Mrs. Hallowses?"

"I mean that things are as bad as they well can be. Nothing will be easy. It will be all you can do to free the property at all, much less carry out the improvements necessary. It will take years of labour and thought and drudgery to do anything."

"By Jove!"

"It will be sordid, tedious, grinding work," she persisted, gently. "You'll hate it, and your first impulse will be to—to resent the folly that has made it necessary. You'll be intolerant of the—the incredible mistakes."

"But I thought there was any amount of money. I—'pon my word, though—I don't believe I ever gave money a thought at all. I had all I wanted always. Does my father know?"

"He—he doesn't realise it. It's too late to repair mistakes when you are old, Jock. I am afraid all that will have to rest with you."

"Doesn't realise it? By Jove!"

"Jock, Jock! is it necessary that he ever should? He can make no reparation now. Why should he suffer? To recognise our folly, and see the result of it clearly,

when the time for reparation is past, when our powers are waning, is the worst grief that can come to age."

Jock was looking at her oddly.

"I was the only woman available to tell you this, Jock, and oh! my dear, I have done it very badly."

"I think you've done it very neatly," said Jock, in an odd, dull voice.

"I seem to have spent my whole life in announcing death and disaster!" cried Cecilia, with sudden bitter vehemence.

Jock realised in a dull way that the poor little woman was trying to apologise to him. He shook off his half-stupor, and smiled as pleasantly as he could.

"You were never cut out to be a flaming angel to cast a fellow out of his fool's paradise," he said, kindly. "I always detested that glittering pair of red-tapeists, with their beastly insolence of office. You're better fitted to make these things for a chap." He touched her knitting, nodded at her, and left the room.

"And this to be my first mother's duty," thought Cecilia. "I—I wonder if he'll associate me, permanently, with this sort of thing? I wonder how I can help the boy—I, who am so ignorant?"

CHAPTER V.

A DAY or so later, in spite of a pattering grape-shot shower of feminine protestation, a bitter nip in the wind, and a low murmur of moaning from out the branches that told of snow travelling south, Joyce mounted her bicycle and flew spinning down the avenue.

She was fleeing from amused glances, from an atmosphere of alluring idleness which seemed to be engulfing her—from a frivolity that it required all her strength properly to detest; from a gayety that hurt her mind by enthralling her spirit.

Wounded principles and the martyr spirit were her spurs, a small upbraiding conscience her whip. Moved by such conflicting emotions, Joyce travelled fast.

When she paused at last to marshal her resisting forces, she found herself some eight or nine miles from home, out amidst an open, wide stretch of low rolling hills, timbered heavily up the slopes, far down into all the broad valleys.

There were neither cattle nor sheep abroad. The pheasants and all the smaller birds with the little ground game were sheltering in the woods. There was no trace anywhere of farm or cottage; no feathery mist of homely smoke at any point flecked the horizon.

It was a lifeless, idle land, suggestive of wasted space and unapplied energy. It filled the little town girl, used to teeming multitudes seeking room wherein to stretch their cramped limbs, with a strange loneliness. She looked about her fearfully. A weird, wan moon, blinking at the daylight, trembled out of its swathing cloud just above the hill. Beyond the woods a great purple and saffron flame showing the track of the declining sun, flared and glowed. It reminded Joyce of the dim flame-land of work to which she belonged.

She sat up straight on her saddle, turned her back

upon Sodom, and strove for high purpose and stern resolve. At the end of a severe tussle she felt that she had won a little victory. She enjoyed for the moment a modest confidence that she had cast off vanity, and feeling unutterably depressed, she laboured up rather a steep hill.

At the top she halted, and held on by a paling in order to look down upon the sad, stripped arms of the trees.

They comforted her. They were so like the lives of which it was her duty to think. She gazed at them with a stiffened lip. They must surely help to compose her mind and bend it back upon the things that matter.

But her thoughts refused to be bound to decay and death. They rushed gayly ahead of her to the bright time of leaves, to the dancing shimmer of Spring green that would presently cloth those wan limbs, to the little live things that would be joyful again amongst the verdant branches.

There was lightness and inconsequence in the very air of the place! She tried to turn her vagrant thoughts to the remoteness, the bewildering vagueness attending the Resurrection garments of those poor, sentient, gaunt limbs whose cause was hers, with the problematical dubiousness of everything connected with their future glory.

The enlightening doubts and reasonable explanations she had imbibed at sundry meetings where Free Thought and Philanthropy marched hand in hand flocked to her succour. She was soon experiencing a most healthful hopelessness.

The trees were cold skeletons again, with no burgeoning whisper of Spring in any twig.

Gay inactivity, a blistering sore upon the land; work the great panacea!

Joyce was obviously regaining her balance.

And then out from the heart of a near wood there leapt a sudden chorus of jubilation, and tumbling across the fence that bound it Joyce beheld a great rushing confusion of spotted creatures, and behind them a

brilliant orgy of leaping horses and flashing of scarlet and white.

Then suddenly there fell an instantaneous hush upon the exultant sounds, and the dogs, with red, lolloping tongues and flaming eyes, swept on in deadly, mute earnest, and hot upon their heels came the men. On in unswerving line they came, shirking nothing, avoiding nothing. To Joyce's excited fancy the superb, insensate crowd was rushing headlong—yet with a most engaging calm—straight upon destruction.

The disorderly order in the advance horrified, thrilled, fascinated Joyce. Her heart was in her mouth, but her spirit soared Heavenward.

Trembling with eagerness, she propped her bicycle against the ditch and mounted the gate.

Before she joined the Peace Society, Joyce had dreamed of battles. This filled her with the joy of one.

She could perceive purpose in the faces of these men, grim earnestness, courage—a fine give-and-take courtesy; for she had noticed in her quick way that not one jostled his fellow or broke the rank of the dogs.

In this condition she could picture unemployed man even as an empire-maker. She could see him rising bodily from the ashes of his dead self to anything. He might become a reformer, a patentee, a philosopher to reorganise society, or reconcile science with religion. Joyce's speculations refused obstinately to disengage themselves from theology, and she had a soaring mind.

Never before had she thought so well of purely Decorative Man. To her inspired vision his face shone.

At that moment a great bass cry tore the clear air, and from the gate now swaying beneath her excitement, Joyce perceived a little quivering, bleeding wisp of quenched life held aloft in a man's great hand.

With a little broken, choked cry, she slipped down from her gate and shut her eyes.

But in less than a second, curiosity and avenging wrath forced them open again. Directing them rigourously upon the abominable spectacle, she recognised in the wretch that dangled the horrid trophy and turned her

late display of inspired emotion to gnashing of teeth, the big young man upon whose behalf she had, not three days ago, even ventured to hope.

She was for the moment too giddy to think, and the little slim bleeding body made her feel extremely sick. Yet—this—this—creature—looked—kind—and—a—conqueror!

Joyce tore her traitorous eyes from his deceiving person, to fix them upon the hunted beast, whereupon repentance became possible. Inevitable indeed! It rushed on her in so imperative a flood as almost to swamp her.

Her vile previous enjoyment of the beast's tortures whipped her like scorpions. For an instant she stood panting, then crushing down her shy terror, balling her small trembling fist, she sprang lightly across a gaping ditch and stood sheer in the midst of the ravening throng of assassins, too deliciously engaged hitherto to have noticed her. But so pleasing a vision under their very noses thrust their sanguinary delirium of joy into the background, and forthwith another set of primitive emotions took the field.

The big crowd of lusty, light-hearted huntsmen turned a simultaneous, mute, admiring gaze upon a face alive with firm resolve, two soft pink cheeks, two fine, raging eyes, a tremulous mouth flinging torrents of inflamed adjectives in their very teeth.

The preacher was so young, however, so honest, so frail and delicate-moulded, so moved by fear and fury, that they stood as still as hay-ricks, and by one impulse every man in the crowd took off his hat, except one, a little local attorney, who stood hand on hip, and leered.

When her first flight of fiery eloquence had swallowed up all her big available words, Joyce fell back upon the little ones.

"Oh! how could you? how could you?" she pleaded. "To think of sane men,"—she paused, interrogatively, with a sweeping glance—"I suppose you are sane?—running all day after a little thing like that"—she pointed an accusing finger that shook—"like that!"

The object was now hanging limp in Jock's meekly lowered hand.

"Poor little luckless thing!" she continued. "Perhaps with a nestful of suffering cubs waiting for it this minute."

It was a dog-fox, and the time January, but Joyce's audience was a lenient one, and its point of view simple. A girl with such a complexion could not be expected to know everything. Something in the combined glance cast at her encouraged Joyce to proceed. "And with so much work to be done!" she cried, valiantly, and the whole world crying aloud for workers!"

By this time she was half blind; she could see dancing before her bewildered eyes nothing but a little glimmer of kind men's faces, which for some incomprehensible cause made her ardent soul leap suddenly up into her frightened face and her voice ring out like silver bells.

"If—if you were to spend just one hot dreadful day in a tired city, and see the work that's to be done there, and so few to do it!" she pleaded, "I—I daresay you'd understand why to see dozens of men and horses all out after one small beast strikes me as—as being beyond words!" In her faintness and distress she picked up at random one of the banal words in use amongst the unemployed.

"Then not even to give it to the poor dogs, who might be glad of it!"

"But don't you see," began Jock, mildly, "it would be rank ruination."

She swept him aside.

"It's a depraved occupation, unworthy of—of—a great nation." She turned her eyes to Heaven. "To look at you, we might be back in the darkness of the Middle Ages."

"It was a pleasant time," murmured Jock. "It's hard to leave it."

"You all look strong enough to—to—leave anything, lift yourselves out of any—any pit. She paused again, overwhelmed by the mortification of her poverty of

biting words. She would have given all she was worth for a few poignant adjectives—for one touch of the rude eloquence in which she had been reared. But these pink-coated idlers confused her mental vision, they jiggled up and down in her brain in a maddening fandango. She felt unutterably ashamed of herself.

"You—you're strong enough to do anything but act like men!" said she, with one last superb effort. Here little Foley broke out into the hee-haw laugh peculiar to himself.

Every tinge of pink flew away from Joyce's cheeks. She winced as though a little lash had stung her, turned blindly, and made for her bicycle.

Jock threw one glance at Foley, then deciding that he was too poor a thing to kick, he dropped the fox and took an old silver cup out of a farmer's hand, which Joyce's harangue had arrested on its road to his lips. "Here's to the true courage!" said Jock, emptying the cup.

Joyce caught the clear, distinct, ringing words, and trembled oddly.

She would have given worlds to look back. But she resisted the devil gloriously, mounted her machine, and without so much as a glance behind her, was off down the slope like a shot.

And rolling down after her there came a thunderous, amazing and most consolatory cheer. For there was not a man in the crowd, except Foley, who stood aside crushed, but was proud of this astonishing, brave little girl with the cracked-brained views. And in a lesser degree they were proud also of Jock, who by his wit and readiness had wiped from off them the stain of Foley's impious cackle.

It was a wholesome symptom, and showed at least that unnecessary and exaggerated scholarship had not altogether played the deuce with the young fellow's intelligence.

Up to this moment many of Anthony's older friends had had their doubts in regard to young Jock Hallows.

CHAPTER VI.

THE wind had dropped suddenly, and the snow swerved off to the east. The moon, that had risen so early that evening, was now a great globe of burnished white silver, brooding high in the velvet sky. The stars hung flashing and sparkling in the dense blue. The air was keen and eager, and the hoofs of the horses echoed like bells on the road, driven dry with the morning wind, and sharp now with the gathering frost. Everything—the trees, the whins, the briar-smothered fences, wrapped in cloud garments of Traveller's Joy, the white gates and a ricketty sign-post—stood out all clear-cut and firm. It was one of those long, light evenings of the north, when a man likes to smoke out in the open, and think of things.

Jock Hallowes, having parted from his last companion at the last cross-roads, turned his attention upon a dream or so he hoped one day to materialise; upon a projected alteration in the stables, and the details of a new head-stall he was thinking out, less fretting to the wearer than that now in vogue. But his thoughts refused somehow to idle amidst these pleasant things; they jerked back imperiously to his more pressing affairs.

If a thing happened to be worth dealing with at all, Jock always managed to sift it to the foundations. And his investigations in the matter of his step-mother's disquieting communication had resulted in certain somewhat appalling revelations.

The property, in short, although full of undeveloped possibilities, was scandalously mismanaged and, by sheer wild folly, impoverished to such an extent that some of the people belonging to the land were in actual distress, most of the farms being too poor either to employ them or pay their own rents.

So much for the prettiest village in the county !

It was a sorry situation, and in more ways than one, moreover, a blow to Jock.

Ever since his babyhood the boy's ruling passion in life had been to find out things for himself. And now he had a magnificent opportunity. The very day before he left Oxford he had been asked to join an exploring expedition of such scope and breadth as would have satisfied his every ambition, and on the whole Jock had rather an inordinate amount of them, and so far the keen edge had been taken off none.

It was a fine, empire-making project, teeming with promise of adventure and big game, soundly buttressed, moreover, with common-sense. After careful prodding, Jock could pick no hole in it.

He accepted the offer with alacrity, and was just about to break the matter to his father, when Mrs. Hallows, with her sorrowful, prim little statement of affairs, set the first stumbling-block that had ever cumbered his triumphant course in Jock's path.

How much more sorrowful, had Cecilia but known ! It is for woman, however, often to deal her worst blow as ignorantly as she does her feeblest peck. It is part and parcel of her heritage.

The money for the expedition was no impossible obstacle. That might have been raised. The question now was whether a man were justified in going off for possibly three years for the benefit of his country and his own diversion, whilst his people went hungry and his lands to the dogs ?

This point Jock would gladly have decided in his own favour, but so far had failed to see his way to so happy a solution of affairs.

Thus, although the night was still and the air clear, not till his mare nearly broke her neck in shying violently away from it, did the preoccupied young man become aware of the low weeping of a huddled mass right in the middle of the road.

Jock's first impulse was to swear.

But an intuitive conviction that the obstacle was

feminine—anything male with vigour enough left in it to howl must surely have pulled itself out of the way—although it left his heart unchastened, controlled the tone of his language. And this, after all, is as profound a result as may be expected of any civilised instinct.

The sudden cessation of the sounds, the haughty uplifting of an undaunted head, the round, childish turn of a cheek waxen white in the moonlight, made Jock step back in haste.

"The little reformer, by Jove!" he muttered, feebly.

With the proud air of a fallen angel, scorning to dry her tears, Joyce rose to her feet and wiped up her back hair.

Accepting this as a sign that no organic injury was done her, "Very glad to see you're not hurt," he remarked, with polite serenity, then turned thoughtfully to expositulate with his protesting steed and give the little thing time to clear the sobs out of her throat.

"Bad bit of road that," he continued, with repressed sympathy. "Fear the bicycle's done for."

"How many miles am I from the Rawsons?" said the lady, with frigidity.

"Nine—I should think. A good nine!"

"Oh! oh!" It was a most galling confession of weakness. Joyce hastened to atone.

"I am an excellent walker."

"I'm sure you are. You jumped that dyke like a bird. Allow me."

The better part of her spokes seemed to be disposed about her person. She shrank away in a panic. "H-have you washed your hands?"

"Well, no. I hadn't the chance yet, but I have a clean pair of gloves in my pocket."

While, with portentous gravity, he was putting them on, from a quick little wince upon the part of his companion, he perceived that she was in considerable pain, and would rather die than say so.

This being so entirely a feminine development, made Jock feel very uncomfortable and rather ineffective.

Calmly considered, the situation held possibilities. As

things were shaping, it portended a cold dinner and a chill. Jock liked a sensitive girl with reticence; she was less common than the other sorts. Also pluck was a fine quality, but there were limits, and she was as light as a feather. Without straining a muscle, he could lift her slick onto the saddle and fairly take the situation by storm.

But another glance at her, with the sudden memory of Foley's laugh, arrested this brutal impulse. At the same time, it was impossible that they should stand fencing there all night.

"If you'll just slip your hand through this bridle," said Jock, in what he took to be an elder-brotherly voice, "I'll put those remains safe. We can send for 'em in the morning. And now," said he, this business completed, "just let me put you up on the saddle, and I'll lead the mare. You needn't be nervous; she'll go like a lamb."

Her dreadful dependence upon a professional murderer was smiting Joyce to the earth. She had been badly brought up, moreover, and knew nothing of her privileges or man's place in nature. She had not yet attained the happy calm of sovereignty. Service in her undeveloped state on the part of a social enemy was more or less a heaping of coals on her head. She lifted her dimpled chin and stiffened herself.

"I am not the least nervous, but—but I couldn't think of doing such a thing."

Jock paused to grasp the quality of his antagonist. "A man must be willing to be cured before you can cure him," he thought, cheerfully, "and it's the same with girls, I suppose." Whereupon he took his resolution and formed his plan.

"Very well, then. I'll ride on as fast as I can lick and send a carriage."

He was aware of her quick gasp, and could feel her thrill of terror.

"Thank you," said she, unfalteringly. "I—I'll walk to meet it."

"That will be a capital plan. Lovely night for a walk.

You know your way, I s'pose? Roads round here puzzling."

"The moon is bright. I can read the sign-posts."

"So few of them," he remarked, apologetically. "However, there are no abysses hereabout, and I'll tell Sir Harry's man to shout, in case you do go a bit off the track."

"Oh! I thank you." A trace of faintness showed in the silvery voice. The moon was under a cloud. The dreadful darkness was drifting down upon them. But, with calm deliberation, Jock mounted his horse.

"I'll not say good-bye," he called out, gayly. "As soon as I've had some dinner," he interposed, untenderly, "I'll call in to see if you've arrived. If you haven't, we'll start a search party."

"V—very good of you."

Jock rode on blithely, humming a tune, and as soon as he was well out of sight, slowed down, and was just about to turn, when he recollected the brush dangling on his off-side. He dismounted, keeping the mare's head turned the right way, and waited discreetly.

"I was thinking," said he, in a casual sort of a way, when she came up, "that perhaps as you're so fond of walking, and there are cows about, you might like me to be within call, instead of going on for the carriage. After all, what's nine miles?"

"But the delay!" she gasped, half choked for her unutterable relief. "The delay for you!"

"Oh, don't think of that. On such a night as this there's nothing I like better than a quiet walk in the moonlight. There's plenty of time! Don't bucket."

In a simmer of mutual and bodily anguish, Joyce forged on, unbending.

It was not the indecorum of the hour or situation that troubled Joyce. She knew nothing of conventional proprieties. She had many a time patrolled the midnight streets with the young men of the Progressive League, and even to consider their masculine quality had not so much as occurred to her. Their sublime earnestness, possibly with their heroic and superhuman attitude toward the powers that be, had warded it off.

Besides, a man was a thing to reform, or to help you in the reformation of others, not an object calculated to cause you any personal discomposure.

But this—this—circumstance was different, and so was the man.

He was stained with the blood of the innocent. Joyce hugged this side of him close. It sustained her. But he had other aspects which would recur. He had witnessed her partial defeat, her cowardly flight. He had listened to that dreadful laugh. She had perhaps—unutterable suspicion!—she had perhaps amused him!

She had noticed for one second an appalling expression in his eyes. When he had said that about the true courage, had *she*, after all, been the butt of his horrible humour? To be wringing your soul to do good to people, and to end in amusing them! With the seriousness of Life weighing on you like a pall, to be converted into a tepid, unwilling buffoon! And the pain of her ankle was growing too fierce any longer to conceal.

If she died for it the next moment, she must limp!

Jock, however, knew more about this matter than she did. She had been limping right from the start, and every step she took hurt him viciously.

He was now surreptitiously and regretfully untying the brush, with a view to dropping it carefully behind a bunch of whins, a landmark he couldn't well miss when he went the next morning to recover his treasure.

Jock thought well of Miss Joyce's dimples, and tenderly of the pain of her little foot, but so far her arguments, although somehow suiting her style, had failed to touch him. They seemed to him rather wholesale for one so ignorant. He had an easy habit of dealing with secondary concerns in a moderate spirit, and with a boy's clearness of vision, had still something of the "not bad" state of mind likewise peculiar to the school-boy.

At the same time, the little aching ankle made him feel dizzy. He had done all he knew in the matter of consideration for emotions peculiar to the feminine organisation. He had given her her head. He had permitted her to enjoy her experience undisturbed. It was

quite time now to subject her to a little common-sense. Jock turned stolidly and faced her. In spite of her limp, she was still fallen angel to the finger-tips, with a proud mouth.

"And now how does the nine miles strike you?" said he, blandly.

Joyce made still one piteous bid for independence, glared sternly at Man the Incomprehensible, and suddenly burst into tears.

"Good Lord!" faltered Jock, when he could speak, "do you mean to say it's as bad as that."

"It isn't bad at all. It's only—"

"It's only that it's about as bad as it well can be," said Jock. With extraordinary presence of mind, recovering his calm, he threw the bridle across Joyce's arm and swept the touch of frost from off a flat stone. He paused, wondering if he hadn't better put his coat on it. Obviously so unused to her rights, he felt that such an attention would only make her feel more coerced even than she did already, and that she would much prefer the stone cold.

He felt really sorry for the poor little thing. Her whole attitude was now one aching, mute protest against everything he did for her. She seemed to know nothing whatsoever, this girl! not to have a notion that anything a man had it in his power to do for her, couldn't, by any chance, be half enough, so why on earth should she make any bones about it! If a girl doesn't know these things by nature, he reflected regretfully, then there must be a screw loose in Nature somewhere, that's all! Jock didn't feel at the moment equal to interfering with so poor a guide to knowledge.

"Sit down," said he, "and let me tinker up the foot." In the momentary awkwardness attendant upon Nature's omission, there was more command than entreaty in the young man's request. Stubborn pride held Miss Anstiss for one unforgettable instant aloft upon one leg. The next, an unbearable twinge of agony dropped her plump on the stone. Thus is soaring spirit ever at the mercy of grovelling flesh.

Having got his own way all along the line, Jock could now afford to be humble. Without a word, he took off her boot, cut her little stocking away, bathed the swollen foot with brandy he had rummaged out of his saddle-pocket, and bandaged it up with a silk handkerchief. And although it happened so naturally that he was hardly conscious of it himself, every light, firm, little touch of Jock's was an apology.

When he got over the worst of the business, it struck him of a sudden that there was something rather uncanny in patching up a girl who was panting all the time to turn you into something like her own glorified self, with all your best points left out.

She was a dear little thing, with the pluck of ten. But Jock gave a sigh of relief when he rose from his knees. It is a strain upon the intellect when a girl cannot take herself, or the man speaking to her, or doing little things for her, for granted. "After all," he reflected, with some sagacity, "if a man can't make a decent fellow of himself, no one else will be likely to do it for him. As for the girl, all she's got to do is to let herself go. She'll be certain to go straight. Why can't this little thing do that, and take a rest, I wonder?" he thought, uncomfortably. Then, for the first time in his life, Jock took notice of the effect of moonlight upon dimples. The phenomenon arrested his attention. He wondered he hadn't remarked it before, but supposed he had always been too agreeably occupied at the time to bother about it. Whereupon he shortened one stirrup carefully, and Joyce, the helpless victim to a twisted ankle and brute strength, robbed of even her right of protest—the one right of which she was acutely aware—quaked piteously.

"Now," said Jock, when he had mounted, "put your sound foot here, and give me your hand."

"You have the pluck of a dozen," he observed presently, with a view to lightening the strain in the atmosphere. "It's no end of a pity you don't ride to hounds. You'd lead the field before we knew where we were. We'd be awfully proud of you!"

Joyce loosened her clutch on his coat and came within an ace of falling.

"I must ask you to sit as tight as you can," said Jock, mildly. "The mare's more than half nervous already. I'm surprised she bears your skirts so well even as she does."

"Nothing would induce me to hunt!" she began courageously. "It—it would make me feel degraded in my own sight." It was a glorious opportunity, and she had volumes to say about it. But it is difficult to speak seriously to a man when you have to hold on for your life to his coat-tails.

She had a thousand clinching arguments to offer, but they all seemed to be frozen in their places.

"There's really no reason you should," said Jock, kindly. "Did you feel like that when the hounds were racing up that slope? For so short a one, it was a magnificent run. You must have seen pretty near the whole of it? Did it strike you then as so revolting a spectacle?"

He felt her little start and her nervous tug at his coat, and generously forbore to peer. At the same time, he meant to get an answer.

After permitting her a sufficiently long silence, he gave a little chirrup, and forthwith the mare's quick, offended reply, and Joyce's wilder gasp, increased his sense of protection, and his victim's of dependence. It was a mean advantage to take, but it must be remembered that Jock was young.

"Won't you tell me, then?" he pleaded.

Another second of silence, and then she burst out, tingling with helpless pain. She might have been a trapped wren.

"I—I thought it was beautiful. But—but that's the—the awfulness of evil things! They're so fascinating!"

For once in his life Jock really felt rather like a miserable sinner.

"That depends on how you're made," said he, soothingly. "I couldn't imagine evil things fascinating you."

"They would," she murmured, breathlessly. "I—fear they would—I—know they would. That rush of dogs

and horns up the hill, and all the swift tumult of colour and brightness, and the extraordinary happiness. It made—me—forget—everything——”

“Like the hunter in Horace,” murmured Jock, artfully.

Joyce beamed. They had something, at least, in common. Truth was terrifying, but once she had broken the ice of it, she was impelled to plunge deeper. There are mystic attractions in depths, and the personal element in the discourse was singularly alluring.

No progressive young man had yet spoken to her of herself. He was always too full of soul and ultimates and negations and abominations of desolations, and other big things, to bend his mind upon her. Besides, if he had—Joyce was of course a Socialist through and through, and she breathed out radicalism; at the same time she had her feelings—and if he had, why it would have amounted to a degree of impertinence scarcely to be imagined upon his part. He was not the sort of person one thinks of—afterwards.

Once indeed had her eyes beholden a Radical addressing a meeting, who had ever since figured large in her dreams as a sort of democratic archangel. But him she had stood aside in her holy of holies, and could certainly not lead forth for purposes of comparison. You cannot treat an archangel or think of him as you may of a sinner. This—this was something altogether different from any other experience known or imagined.

Joyce's eyes shone with the dawn of a new egoism and sheer dramatic joy.

Jock slowed his mare's paces to those of a snail.

“I had never seen anything the least like it,” pursued Joyce. “I could have shouted for joy. And now—now,” said she, sorrowfully, “it feels like some horrible madness.”

“It was no more than nature,” said Jock, reassuringly. “Why, haven't you the best hunting blood in the country in your veins? Didn't I say you'd ride like a bird?”

“I hope I may never sink to that level. Now that I have realised my temptation, my savage instincts——”

She was getting much more fluent. She felt, in consequence, a thrill of pure thankfulness—"I hope I may be able to resist them. At least one can keep away from— from things," she said, more meekly, thinking of the recency of her lapse.

"Or approach them philosophically," pleaded Jock.

"Or not approach them at all," said Joyce, sharply. She was feeling ever so much better.

"That," said Jock, firmly, "would be a confession of weakness. We ought to sift our temptations, approach them, you know, in a spirit of inquiry, as meek as you can make it. So long as a doubt lies about the validity of a temptation, it is our—our human right to explore it. We must have experience, you know, to fight the devil. Think of all he has, and what a crafty adversary it's made him. To win battles, we must temper our steel with fire, can't you see! And——"

"This is sophistry," said Joyce, sternly. Suddenly she paused, and felt cold to her very bones. "And—and—I don't think you're quite serious. Oh! am I amusing you again? Oh, please will you tell me? I'd rather know."

"Hem——" he began, but Joyce rushed on.

"I am. I see. I amuse every one, and I wish—I wish—I could tell you how dreadful it makes me feel."

"This is what playing with edged tools brings you to," thought Jock, ruefully. "I'll give a dig to the mare, and divert the poor girl's thoughts."

But Jock always found a difficulty in following the shorts cuts of cowards, and the little girl seemed to be aching with seriousness. He was obliged, after all, to fall back upon the simple.

"It's a bit difficult to explain," he ventured, feebly. "You're—you know—you're different——"

"Oh! just as though I didn't know! That's it, I'm different. I'm sort of a new play to you all. It's the same in the house" she cried, breathlessly. "In my room at night, the other girls come to make me amuse them. Just as people go to—to—shows—to see freaks. I'm—I'm a social freak, I suppose."

"Hang it all," thought Jock, desperately, "this is too much. Miss Anstiss, I assure you—really, it's not like this a bit. You exaggerate things confou—very much. Don't you think," he pleaded, "that some of this amazing notion you've got hold of may come from your not understanding us?"

"But I try to understand. I don't turn your limitations into polite mockery. I try to be fair. I try to—to grasp your temptations."

"Oh!" said Jock; "that's how you feel about us, is it? Oh, well, it's a healthy state of mind, anyhow. If you could grasp even a tithe of the temptations, I can tell you, you'd feel twice as indulgent."

"Your temptations are so very delightful," she murmured, relenting. His voice somehow touched her. "They are so much the outcome of the past, of generations of soft-living, luxury, idleness, faculties withered and lopped off for want of use." She remembered all at once that she was striving after charity, and changed the subject.

"Since I saw that wonderful rush up the hill, I feel quite different," she admitted, generously. "It has altered many things."

"By Jove! But it's such a new point of view to put hunting among the temptations, you know."

His tone was anything but satisfactory. Joyce felt dreadfully young. She sat up sternly, and although she still grasped the necessary coat, she now displayed a delicate superciliousness in her grasp of it.

"One could hardly expect you to call what so effectively kills time for you by any harsh name."

"But the real temptations are so huge," he pleaded, "we can afford quite well to leave out hunting, you know. Mustn't be too hard on us. I tell you we have precious bad dragons to face! They'd surprise you really."

"Dragons!" Her voice thrilled with scorn. "Dragons that—that wear purple and fine linen and step delicately!" Of a sudden Joyce's eyes filled with tears, her voice faltered, her fingers trembled on their wisp of red

cloth. "Think of those other dragons—ours! Think of the generations of overcrowding and poverty and crime and dulness and disease on shoulders too tired to bear them! Think of the bitterness that ugliness brings! None of you know how—it—it gets into one. Of—of youth with no sun on it. Think of the lives that, in spite of everything done, and left undone, will go, unquickened to the end. Oh! think of it all."

"My dear little girl," said Jock, hardly daring to speak aloud, "you think of it all a deal too much. Couldn't you leave some of it, you know, to God? I thought," he added, apologetically, "I thought it came natural to girls to do that sort of thing—without any storm or stress."

"To your girls, perhaps," said Joyce, in a hard, strained voice, "all out in the sun. What do they know of the things this God of theirs permits in the shade? If you live in a great town, seeing souls going out amidst the shadows, you grow tired of calling upon God, for you know that He has forgotten."

"Look at the moon on the water there," said Jock, gently, "and the frost on the hill-side. It's a nice world, and you'll find a lot of decent people in it. I couldn't believe somehow that God has forgotten it, or us who live in it."

"Do you mean to say that you believe in these things?" There was a shrillness in Joyce's voice that made him wince. "Have you sifted the evidence? Have you examined things? They told me—they told me—that you were clever!" She felt faint with surprise. Had he been a mere fox-hunter; a lustreless, attenuated curate; a bearer of burthens; a girl who curls her front hair and tightens her waist! But this!

She tried to look round at him, but his shoulders were in the way. She could, however, catch the outlines of his face and chin. There was weakness in neither. Still less was there mockery. She sighed with relief, and with feminine eloquence, forged on.

"Have you compared religions? Have you grasped the similarity in creeds? Have you watched the rise of

each Jehovah and the fading of His glory? Do you mean—do you mean to say that you pin your faith upon the Thirty-nine Articles?" she demanded, with sinking heart.

"Upon my word, I've never looked at 'em," said Jock.

"Nor looked at poverty! And yet you believe! It's an hereditary instinct, I suppose, like hunting, or dancing, or shaving." The fine smoothness of the cheek half-turned to her suggested this simile.

"I have seen beauty and goodness," said Jock, pleasantly; "that may have something to do with my folly. I don't profess to have studied statistics or tracked Jehovahs, you know. But, roughly speaking, I'm inclined to think that on the whole things go rather on the side of the angels. Chance, after all, is a slack potter. You'll never find perfection come out of his workshop, and a devil couldn't turn out beauty. So, by the mere process of exclusion, you'll be forced to admit something in the shape of a God into the business. You feel misconception yourself too keenly to be really intolerant," said Jock, nervously.

The conversation embarrassed him a good deal. He was anxious not to aggravate its unpleasantness.

"I feel the hideousness of injustice too keenly to—to—kneel to it," said Joyce.

"Don't think of injustice. Look out there at the flood of moonlight on the pines, and then think how pretty you are, and how good!" said Jock, softly, as though he were speaking to a child.

"How can you? Oh! how can you? Lightness in such a matter!"

"But it's the simple fact."

"Do—do you believe in the Trinity? Do you understand that?" she cried, in desperation.

"Do you know what the boy said to St. Austen: 'When I have laved the sea dry, then shalt thou understand the mystery of the Trinity.' I believe a lot in beauty and goodness."

"I don't understand you."

"Then remember that rush up the hill, and give me the benefit of the doubt."

"Ah! now I'm amusing you again!"

He screwed round to look at her.

"Can't you see that no one but a brute would be amused at you?"

"You take things so lightly."

"One can't be habitually sombre in a jolly world."

"If only you knew the other side."

"I know too much of it from your face. It hangs like a millstone around your neck."

"Were—were you amused?" she demanded, suddenly, "when you said that—that about 'the true courage,' you know?"

"No. I was very proud of you, and every man there was just as proud. We all like courage and truth. And when it happens to look awfully nice, we like it quicker. That's all the difference."

"Oh!"

"We're weak creatures. No one knows that better than you."

"Oh, how can——"

"But you must try to understand us. Here we are. Sir Harry's gates are there round the corner. It wasn't so long after all, was it?"

"It seemed only a few minutes," said she, after a pause, in which she was feeling rather dizzy. "You are kind," she added, hurriedly. "No one was ever quite so kind—in the same way—before. I—things made it impossible." She paused, with a faint intention of explaining to him, a serious young man given over to Progress; but suddenly the difference of man to man became too difficult for common words. She sighed. "But I do not think I shall ever understand you," she murmured, feebly.

"You will," said he, soothingly. "And meanwhile be lenient, and you might, on occasion, you know, shut your eyes and trust to the guidance of Nature. Hullo! there's the carriage. What are they doing out this time of night, I wonder?"

At the sound of delicate hoofs upon the crisp road, Anthony, who knew every foot-fall in his stable, thrust his head out of the window.

"Good Lord!" he groaned, "it's the minx; and to judge from her position, she's an outrageous one!"

"Perhaps," said Cecilia, with aching heart, the soft grey feathers of her bonnet nodding discreetly over the Squire's shoulder, "perhaps she's only modern."

"Modern be hanged!" muttered the sorrowful parent. "We may thank our stars, ma'am, if she's not a sink of iniquity."

CHAPTER VII.

"My dear Anthony," said Mrs. Hallowes, noticing a look of firm purpose about the Squire's mouth, and a disposition in him to loiter beside the hall-fire, "we have snipe for dinner, and are already a little late."

"In that case," said Anthony, hobbling off at full speed, "for Heaven's sake, be quick with your toggery!" He paused to glance back at her. "And look here, ma'am, don't bother Jock to-night about that little incident. The sublime egoism of woman makes her always attach undue importance to every episode into which her calamitous presence may have happened to intrude itself. And trust her to hurl herself broadcast upon any scent with herself on the trail, thus often merely pointing the way to a poor nibbling fool, who might otherwise have ridden off upon some safe and wholesome instinct."

"Indeed, my dear Anthony, you may trust me not to tamper with any wholesome instinct of Jock's."

"Besides, it's quite possible that the minx may have something wrong with her nose, or the turn of an eyebrow," said Anthony, over his shoulder, "and that, believe me, will do more to save the fellow than a cart-load of feminine arguments. Nature's occasionally merciful," said Anthony, with a magnanimity born of the promise of snipe.

"We can only hope," said Cecilia.

She did not move from the fire, however, but stood there listening intently, and presently, half absently, she took off her bonnet. The wind had ruffled up her white hair into fleecy ripples, and freshened her cheeks. They flushed pinker at the sound of Jock's step.

Jock was not so preoccupied but that he could hum a tune, and notice likewise the charm of the quiet, gracious, grave little presence in the soft, warm glow of the firelight.

"She's just the right sort of woman to have about the

house," he thought, contentedly, warming his hands over the flame.

"Had you a good day?" she asked, kindly.

"Rather! Splendid from start to finish! Where were you just now?"

"Coming back from Burnam."

"Oh! Things pretty bad there?"

"Yes, Jock. I think your father is a little afraid of how you may take things. Now that facts keep pressing close upon him, he is realising everything much more than he has done hitherto."

"Poor old dad! hadn't you better put a stop to that, Mrs. Hallows?"

"How beautiful he looks," thought Cecilia, smothering a sigh. "It would be nice if he could call me 'mother.'"

There was a little pause, broken suddenly by Jock's laugh.

"I had a romantic adventure to-day," said he.

"Where did you meet her?" said his step-mother promptly.

"Pretty good that, for St. Cecilia. I met her originally at the Rawsons. Lady Rawson's niece, you know. Brought up in a hot-bed of Radicals, with a bookworm for a father, and work for a God; looks upon hunting as one of the deadly sins."

"Oh!" said Cecilia, in a depressed tone.

"She met us at the top of Harrup's hill this afternoon and addressed us upon our depraved instincts. Awfully plucky of her, too, shaking all over the whole time."

"You mean to tell me that Lady Rawson's niece addressed the field?"

"She did, by Jove! and to some purpose, too."

"The girl is eighteen! Her bringing-up has been unspeakable! I am sincerely sorry for Lady Rawson."

"You wouldn't, if you'd been there. Pluckiest little girl you ever saw. I daresay, though, she does stir 'em up a bit at the Park."

"Is she pretty?" demanded the lady, with serene despair,

"Pretty! I'm not sure that she's not more than that. Anyway, she's uncommon."

"Oh, indeed."

"I came on her later, with a sprained ankle and a smashed bicycle. It was at the foot of Jake's Hollow, a good nine miles off, so there was nothing for it but to take her up behind me and bring her home."

There was no embarrassment visible upon Jock's countenance. Cecilia, nevertheless, was now quite hopeless. "Nine miles behind Jock," she thought, distractedly, "and, no doubt, holding on the whole time to his coat. The boy hasn't a chance!" But meanwhile there was another step-mother's duty waiting for her to perform. She caught, furtively, hold of a newspaper, and was about to begin, when Jock looked suddenly down at her.

"By Jove! I knew she reminded me of some one. She's exactly like what you must have been at eighteen."

"Jock! Like me!"

Jock did not hear her. He was reflecting upon her face.

"She's the image of you, especially with your head bare. Her hair's just like yours, only it's gold instead of silver. What makes you cover up your head with those white things?"

"I have worn caps now for twenty years," said Mrs. Hallowes, primly.

"Twenty years! What on earth for?"

Cecilia laughed faintly.

"I began the habit, I believe, in order to keep myself from worldly-mindedness."

"Just the duffing sort of thing the little girl would do. She's riddled with misapplied conscience. You mustn't wear them any more," he commanded, regally.

"No," said she, joyfully, "I won't. Miss Anstiss must be extremely modern?" she ventured.

Jock grinned. "Anything but that. She's a plant grown up white in an old cellar, and judges everything accordingly."

"Dear me!"

"You'd put her out in the sun and spoil her like anything, if you knew her!"

About this Cecilia felt doubtful, but the trust implied in the confident assertion made her more firm. She could now better approach the circumstance that had caused her to hustle her husband, who loved not haste, off to dress, and herself wait for Jock, when she ought to have been getting ready for dinner.

"Jock," said she, opening the paper, "have you seen this?"

Jock glanced at it, then clutched and read it eagerly. It was a forecast of the coming expedition set forth in one of the morning papers, in every clause frequent and laudatory mention of himself.

"Did my father see this?"

"No. You hadn't spoken of it. I thought you'd rather tell him yourself."

Jock, glancing at her absently, was arrested of a sudden by something in her eyes which it struck him vaguely that he must have been wanting rather all his life.

"You have a nice way of doing things," said he, rousing himself. "I'll chuck this paper into the fire, before the servants get hold of it."

"Jock! Why?" The words burst out in spite of her. But she had known all the time what must happen.

"With the place in the state it is, I can't very well clear out for three or four years, you know. I had no idea of this, of course, when I arranged to go. It's just as well I hadn't mentioned it to my father, isn't it?"

"It is all big, and complete, and purposeful," said Cecilia, wistfully, watching the feathery black flakes of fluff fly up the wide chimney. "It will be a great expedition. It will do a great deal of good."

"It will be ripping fun," said Jock.

She put out her thin beautiful hand and laid it lightly on his pink sleeve. "There's snipe for dinner, dear,"—a strange note of tenderness went throbbing through the common words—"and we've just got five minutes in which to dress."

"Oh, well," said Jock, "it's a good thing, then, that you won't have the cap to pin on! That will hurry you."

"And, oh! to think of his remembering that now," thought Mrs. Hallowes, as she hurried up the stairs, half blind for tears. "It's a big sacrifice, bigger than I thought; and everything they do is very interesting. They have curious ways of going about things! I like them—I like them better than ours,—I think. I wish," she thought, touching her uncovered head doubtfully, "I wish I did not feel so glad that his own mother is dead. It is so barbarous in me. It's so—so very unmotherly."

"There can be little doubt," she concluded, with a glow of true motherhood, as she went down the stairs, "that the girl is dreadful."

When she drove over to Lady Rawson's next day to find out, before she spoke a word to Joyce, she took care to inspect her in her relations to other girls.

The inspection was scarcely satisfactory.

The girl had no ease of manner whatsoever. She appeared to be entirely unused to civilisation—as watchful, as much on the defensive as a savage, and in her great eyes there flamed a consuming fire that looked impersonal.

Cecilia liked youth to be young. She also liked its little vices to match its years.

Vanity, coquetry, frivolity, unabashed selfishness, thoughtlessness, temper, all these, and worse, she could have accepted with equanimity. Sorrow and the years would only too surely chasten and purge them, every one. But for a young creature, with the glory of the whole world at her feet, to be burning herself up, joylessly, for the sake of projects. Projects! With all the beautiful mysteries of life knocking at the gates of her laggard heart; the new voice, which is also everlasting, calling aloud to her to follow, follow, follow; the new law, everlasting, also commanding her to obey. In the light of all her own eager heart had lost, but even now reached out after, back, back, into the cold distance, the girl's attitude struck Cecilia as inexcusable.

This the girl to be thrown, under the light of a confounding moon for nine long miles, literally into Jock's arms!

Jock had talent, fine feeling, a sublime spirit. His was not the make to temper his gifts with judicious fat. He was too sound for liver, too active for gout.

According to Cecilia's experience, every man imperatively demands one governing impulse of paramount importance.

Later, Jock would inevitably develop nerves. Nerves! And those bothering eyes! That suppressed, unrestful volcano brooding by Jock's hearth! Unspeakable outlook! At the same time, since Jock thought her pretty and like her—herself!—Cecilia looked more charitably at the small, dainty creature upon the sofa, now answering questions uneasily, and advanced towards her with a sober gravity which forthwith dispersed her investigators, two strapping young women in marvellous French confections, who, in the pleasantest way in the world, had been trying new methods of wiping the little Radical's eye. These athletic ladies only knew Mrs. Hallows in her character of saint, and naturally fled before her.

"I hope your ankle is better," said she, sitting down. "I have been hearing of your accident from Jock Hallows." She would have liked dearly to say "my son." It would have made everything so easy, given her so overpowering an advantage over this girl, but she could not think of taking so unfair an advantage of Jock's absence.

"I hope you are not seriously injured," she enquired, gently.

Joyce had heard of Mrs. Hallows. An uneventful little woman, given over to unscientific nursing and the decoration of churches; full of old-fashioned prejudices; a blatant encourager of the insupportable lack of independence and proper pride flaring forth in the conduct of all the villagers; never entered any house without full hands, and spoilt all the children. Then, in extreme old age, married a man notorious as being the worst landlord in the place, and instead of trying to open his eyes, sealed

with fatness, when he was too gouty to ride, she drove him to the hunts.

A history scarce worth a pause!

Still, after the two uncompromising, disturbing positives, she was, at least, a restful negative, and Joyce's manners, in spite of her, were pretty when unattacked, and her eyes disposed to kindness.

"Thank you so much; my ankle is better. I think it will be quite well in a few days."

She was now computing the cost of Mrs. Hallows' sables, and the time it took to produce that delicate, etched-in effect which distinguished the little lady.

"And this," thought Joyce, sadly, "in remote county society, this is a saint! What a conception! People who know nothing of self-sacrifice, of cold and hunger and hardships and the horrors of life, who live in gardens, to try to build up a saint! and that *He* should live always with her and the like of her! One can wonder at nothing! In such a life, after a time, a man could believe in anything! and smile his life away."

Not in priggishness, but as a sort of hopeless protest against luxury and slipping down to extinction upon greased ropes, Joyce glanced at the soft, nestling feathers in Cecilia's bonnet, then at the small jewelled hands resting idly upon her silken lap.

Cecilia meanwhile was looking quietly around the room.

"This is quite the most healthy family I know," said she, her inspection completed. "It knows no pain save gout, which, since it threatened to last and interfere with sport and family felicity, receives solicitous attention. But you see, a disabled ankle, if you don't ride to hounds and do understand Greek, is just a pause in which you may consult the classical authors at your leisure. From what I can gather, this ankle of yours is left mostly to Nature and the Classics!"

"I assure you it's nearly well."

The surprised, shrinking unresponsiveness in the eyes, the haughty lift of the head, were trying to Cecilia. But

she had to do what Jock would like, not what she herself would have chosen.

"I notice that there are three sofas in this room," she pursued, serenely. "I think we must appropriate one to your sole use, and see if Art may not help Nature a little."

"Really, Mrs. Hallowes, I am quite comfortable." Her eyes were snapping.

To think of such a look as directed upon Jock! Cecilia felt keenly distressed, but she could control herself finely.

"Won't you let an old women have her way, my dear?" she asked, gently. "I have grown so used to coddling people, that it has become a habit with me. Are you to be the only one who won't indulge me in it?"

Joyce had passed every St. John's ambulance examination yet invented, and knew every bone in her body by heart. She might have puzzled many an amiable practitioner. She shuddered before the touch of those white, beringed, amateur fingers that continually pauperised the poor. Nothing tried her more severely than to see these good people play at philanthropy, and that she should be the object!

"The doctor has seen my ankle," she protested.

"A doctor's not a nurse. He's not here now to see that you're feverish with the pain of putting such a foot as this to the ground."

Joyce's spirit towered, revolting, but her breeding made any further resistance impossible.

"Of course I can only thank you ever so much, but the pain is really noth—hardly anything—quite bearable." She hoped this sounded all right and sufficiently polite, but pain somehow flurried her. "When one thinks of real pain," she added presently, and in this little sentence her voice was her own, and very sweet.

"This is quite real enough," said Cecilia, gently. "Oh! Lady Rawson, you've come to find out what I'm interfering with now, are you? I'm giving way as usual to my besetting sin, and your little niece is indulging me."

"My dear Mrs. Hallowes! We all know you!" She

cast an indulgent glance fraught with compassion upon her harassed niece. "She's not robust," she mourned, contentedly. "Too much brain-work and taking duties too seriously to heart. She must follow the example of our dear girls and amuse herself." She touched Joyce's flushing cheek with a motherly forefinger. "But now you must do all that Mrs. Hallowes tells you," she said, with kindest pity, "and read your full of those wonderful books. After that we must see what we can do with you!"

Joyce felt like a sawdust doll! "You must relax, dear, a little; let yourself go, you know, like the others, you quiet little mouse!"

"Thank you," murmured Joyce, feeling by this time like a worm whom civilisation forbids to turn.

"So curious!" said Lady Rawson to one of her old friends, in a clear and far-reaching aside, "and her mother such a high-spirited madcap! Poor dear!"

"It's that poor Radical father," said the sympathising friend, "and letting her go about at all hours with those dreadful scientific, progressive people, all atheists, with the vilest manners and the most depraved theories on the marriage question. My husband went to one of their amazing meetings once," she explained, with sublime vagueness. "You may be thankful, my dear, that she's like a human being at all, even in appearance!"

"Oh, well, my dear Arabella, the Rawson blood counts for something!"

There was something very like terror in Joyce's eyes as they turned to look at these comfortable judges who, having disposed of her case, were now bent upon the spring bulbs.

Cecilia could have found it in her heart to carry her home with her there and then.

But it was impossible! It was not for her to thrust Jock bodily into the lion's jaw; not for her to fly defiant in the face of Providence.

"It's the hardest thing in the world," said Mrs. Hallowes, as she arranged the now passive and quivering Joyce in her pillows, "to submit to have things done for

you when all your life you have been doing things for other people. I was just as proud at your age. It's nice to watch you. Anything that brings back one's own youth is delightful. We're quite egoists!" she sighed. "We weave ourselves into everything. If I happened to be ill, I remember sitting bolt up in bed, angry and protesting, instead of lying still like any one else and getting well!"

"You!" said Joyce, interested in spite of herself.

"I!" said Cecilia, laughing. "Yes, I; even I! The meekness of age is quite another thing from the meekness of nature. And youth revolts against taking. It likes to give."

Joyce's body was now so comfortable that her spirit felt less sore. "But you h— there are so many sorts of youth," she said, a little wistfully.

"There are many sorts of circumstances," said Cecilia, softly, "but only one youth; and it can nearly always overcome the circumstances."

"Oh! you only see one side. You—you cannot understand."

"I have little Latin, and less Greek," said Mrs. Hallows, with a smile, "but consider my wrinkles and my white hair." Half involuntarily, her jewelled fingers went forth to touch both. "I know a great many things, and I understand some."

Joyce flinched, imperceptibly. She was growing afraid of the little, old etching. She hardly knew if she would altogether care to be judged by her. She felt it would be a true judgment, and perhaps she did not feel quite ready for it.

This was Joyce's first prick of true humility since she had entered the gates of Brecon Park. Nothing like righteous protest for keeping the soul proud! To be stripped suddenly of this sure shield and defence is a strange sensation. It holds one silent.

"What's the book?" said Mrs. Hallows, fishing one up from behind a pillow. "Ah! how well I know it. I read it aloud from cover to cover to some one who had no longer any youth with which to defend himself, whom

circumstances had overcome. And never, to my dying day, will I forget the crushing chilliness of those baleful pages. My dear child, such literature was made for prize-fighters, or the defeated, not for little things with nerves, who are going to conquer! I have a book at home now. Will you read it if I send it over?"

"Yes, thank you," said Joyce, with a meekness that deserved recognition.

"Jock Hallows," said Cecilia, generously, "says that it's a rip"—she hurriedly primmed her mouth—"a most delightful book."

Directly she entered her carriage, Mrs. Hallows plumped back amongst her pillows, and fell to fanning herself with her pocket handkerchief, delicately.

"It's been wearing," she murmured, "but I do trust I have acted as Jock would wish me to act. I only hope," she added, straightening her limp back, "that I have done as well as his own mother, in the peculiar circumstances, would have succeeded in doing."

She thought of that suppressed glint of temper in Miss Anstiss's fine eyes, and fanned herself with renewed vigour.

"That poor little creature will need a deal of altering before she is in any sort of way fit for Jock. How beautiful youth is! But if—oh!—if only one could defend the helpless creatures from its disastrous consequences!"

CHAPTER VIII.

WITH a view to an exploratory mention of the minx, Anthony came down the next morning early, meaning to entrap Jock upon his return from the stables. But Jock only appeared when breakfast was half over, to find his father, to whom baulked purpose was ever peculiarly abhorrent, in a state of profound exasperation concerning the strides made lately by the radicals, and with the meanest possible opinion of the future.

"Radicals and Conservatives are now so much alike," said Cecilia, pensively, "that one seems to be as lax and wanting in proper feeling as the other. Since quite reputable men come to garden parties in straw hats, and never dream of calling after an invitation, and no one speaks pure English, while few write it, and the outward demeanour furnishes surely a true index of the mind, it's really difficult to distinguish a Radical, however rabid, from a Conservative."

"How a woman's millinery instinct must tinge everything," said the Squire. "Thank Heaven! I should recognise a Radical in a bath-towel."

"I heard Cecil Greatorix—his family is surely Conservative enough!—call Helen Becket 'dear boy' at lunch the other day," pursued Cecilia, thoughtfully, "and allude to Mary Lawrin as——"

"That may be, ma'am. But you'll not catch the fellow with a Non-conformist conscience."

"No. On the contrary! At least," hedged Mrs. Hallowes, modestly, "at least, so I should infer. A Non-conformist conscience," she added, wistfully, with a furtive glance at Jock buried in his paper, "must be a great safeguard."

"For weak-kneed wobblers, perhaps, revelling for the first time in their lives amongst the flesh-pots! They no doubt require an unduly severe bearing-rein, as a

starved child in a cook-shop will call for a firm fist. But when you're used to—to abundance—have, so to speak, lived all your days in Egypt—if," said Anthony, sublimely, "if you have traditions, and self-respect——"

"Hem!" murmured his wife.

Jock grinned, and lifted up his voice.

"Better chuck all you've got to say about Radicals off your chest now, sir, and clear the air, for there's one coming to stay with us to-morrow."

"Good Lord! Who?"

"James Coates. Remember you met him one day at my rooms?"

"Oh! I remember. Sorry for your curtains, Cecilia. To the day of my death I'll remember the tobacco he smoked."

"I remember, too, to my cost. He's an absent-minded sort of chap. He picked a bag of it up in More's rooms and made off with it."

"Whose rooms?"

"More's. Father's a Marquis—seventh of Townby."

"Whew! That's what comes of associating with such fellows."

Jock failed to catch the logic in this astonishing statement, but forebore comment.

"He has no doubt the conscience, hem! peculiar to his kind," ventured Mrs. Hallowes, mildly.

"Well, no. I should call his quite peculiar to himself."

"But what's to be done with the fellow?" demanded Anthony. "He couldn't ride a broomstick, may take your oath as to that. Let him get hold of a gun, and our lives aren't worth an hour's purchase. Can't have him disseminating atheistic anarchy among the servants, or holding prayer-meetings. And I'd like to catch him making love to any girl that comes to this house! No need, however, to conjure up imaginary dangers. What's a shock-headed stick, after all? How can a fellow be expected to make flesh and blood love with his mind choked with drains and the cutting down of estimates? What's to be done with him? That's what I'd like to know."

"Perhaps he has views and hobbies," began Mrs. Hallowes, temperately.

"He's all views and hobbies, of course. But he's been through the mill of a public school and the university. We have some ground for hoping that he'll have the decency to spare us some of 'em."

"He may have tastes common to all parties," persisted Cecilia. "What did he talk about the day you met him?"

A sudden flash of recollection flooded in upon Anthony. He wished Cecilia would learn to hold her tongue.

"Oh, the conversation wasn't noteworthy," he said, absently, dropping into the *Times*. "Don't go to undergraduates' rooms for intellectual stimulus. Probably about a dog."

"He was telling us, don't you remember, sir, about his pedigreed bull-pup. Used to be the pride of Trinity. Wouldn't look at an undergraduate's calf, but bring a don within reach of his teeth! Gad! I wish I had the little beggar!"

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Hallowes, brightening up, "he seems to be quite a rational human person, then!"

"If fellows of that order associate with gentlemen, they have to adapt themselves, superficially at least, to the manners and customs of gentlemen. Catch the devil coming to a dinner-party in horns and hoofs! He'd be the best-dressed man in the room, you may take your oath of that, and these Radical fellows have the devil's own craft. He'll have picked up some of the trimmings by this time; feel comfortable in a starched shirt, and all that. But if the man comes to my house, I want him to be enjoying himself, not always on the strain to conform. That's what bothers me. A guest is a guest."

Having no illuminating remark to offer upon this subtle distinction, Jock took some jam.

"Looks like frost," said the Squire. "Perhaps he skates. Can't object to that on democratic grounds, since every farmer lad and counter-jumper in the neighbourhood is free to cut capers to his heart's content on my ponds. Poor beggars! I'm sure they're welcome!"

Anyway, it's a clean amusement for 'em ; only don't let him get wind of the cherry-brandy, or he'll be saying that we're debauching the backbone of the country. And, Cecilia, you'd better order in some of that imitation champagne poison. Ten to one he's a total abstainer."

"Don't bother about that, sir. He's overcome some of his disqualifications. He didn't begin yesterday, you know. Been at it a long time now—four years older than I am."

"One thing he hasn't overcome, anyway, and that's how to get his hair cut. Often wonder how the opposition Benches grow it!"

"In James' case, it's mostly head."

"Humph! What is he?"

"I'm not sure that he's not a genius."

"Genius be hanged! What's the fellow's trade?"

"Chemical works."

"Ha! I recollect your saying he was scientific. Fits in his scholarship seemingly to the needs of the trade. Always something low about science. Odd, too. There's no denying it's useful. He writes, of course?" demanded Anthony, hopelessly.

"I'm afraid he does a little."

"Ah! that's it!" Anthony fell sadly back upon Burton, finely interpolated by himself. "He must have a barren wit that in this scribbling age can forge nothing. Scarce able to hold a pen, and must say something. Get himself a name by stealing good men's thoughts. Skimming the cream off his master's milk. A generation of thieving milkmaids!"

"A dwarf standing on the shoulders of a giant may see farther than the giant himself," said Jock, quoting in his turn. It could hardly be expected that his father should relish this sort of thing.

"No need to stand on the shoulders of a mouse to condemn, vilify, censure, abuse, and that's what the Radical literature of the day amounts to. Any fool can break down and smash, but no soul," he said, with genuine feeling, "no soul was ever yet saved by abuse."

"Oh, Anthony," said his wife, eagerly. It was a

delight to be able to take Anthony seriously. "I'm glad you said that. I sometimes think that to dishearten a soul is only one degree less vile than to murder a body."

"Ah! ma'am. You're not scientific, you see. That reminds me now that Edmund's coming in this morning about that new chemical manure."

"What's a man to do?" thought Anthony, dejectedly, as he walked off. "If you don't send your son to a public school, you make a milksop of him. If you do, you fill your house with miserable makers of stinks. Lord! but it's an ominous lookout for the puling country."

"Why, do you like him, Jock?" said Cecilia.

"Like him! Why he's one of the best chaps I know." Jock paused and laughed down at her. "Still, since I can't define him very clearly to myself, I won't attempt it with you. You'll have to find him out for yourself. He's a sort of mixed chap. His instincts and his principles appear to clash a bit."

"Oh, like a woman!" she murmured.

"Well, no. Not like a woman exactly. He does what's necessary—to his point of view—they're rum, some of 'em—and sort of walks round the sensations and makes jokes, good ones, sometimes, too, about them."

"He'll like to smoke in his bed-room," said Mrs. Hallows, after a short mental summary.

"I'm afraid you'll have to let him do that."

James Coates arrived next day about half-past four. He had a lazy, loose way of coming into the room. It made Cecilia thoughtful. It was different altogether from the careless languor, and the vigour, more careless still, of many of her other visitors, but she did not dislike it. It made her observant.

Anthony labelled it, in his haste, damned cheek.

Although Mr. Coates' head had struck his hostess as bumpy and vast, she could yet see nothing amiss in the cut of the brown hair.

She felt as though she could breathe more freely. A fear lest any friend of Jock's should seem ridiculous in the eyes of the servants had tried her greatly. She began forthwith upon the journey, cheerfully. The

Squire, too, had now risen to the occasion, and was feeling about gingerly after suitable conversation, when of a sudden the sound of a muffled scrimmage in the hall loosened the tension of his upper lip. He stood up, with laboured ease. But Jock, with something not unlike a chuckle, was before him, and with a glance and an apologetic murmur directed towards Mrs. Hallows, Mr. Coates also made for the door.

Anthony fetched up on the threshold to behold an unparalleled bull-dog, with a sort of noiseless, contemptuous tenacity holding on to a large unstable calf, while the six-foot victim whimpered in passive dread.

The exquisite perfection apparent in the dog's points for one unhallowed instant seized the Squire's glance. Then he wrenched it off, to fix it in a cold stare upon the pup's master.

After one perfunctory glance at the suffering giant, this Radical intruder, with an entirely unmoved voice and manner, had fallen to argue mildly with the superior animal.

"Puck, you rascal!" said he, in his deep, quiet voice, "you've made a mistake. Wouldn't have brought you if I'd thought you'd lose your head like this. Look here, my good fellow," he murmured, turning and addressing himself to John, "hold still, will you? A fiver will cure all the hurt you'll get. Can't spoil the pup, you know, by hurrying him. Here, lad, off! It's poor sport, you purblind ass!" He tapped the calf significantly, and delicately tickled Puck's nose.

Cecilia turned from the sickening spectacle to glance at the Squire and contemplate Jock, hands in pockets, smiling like an angel.

"If the poor young man were but a Conservative, Anthony would look just as pleased," reflected the lady. "Radical or Conservative, upon many subjects they're all just primeval man." Her eyes paused one scornful instant upon whining John, then moved away. "I'm glad it's not Peter," she thought; "he's active, and so good to his mother! This great lazy coward of a thing, I fear, bets, and if anything, will enjoy the rest!"

A sudden thin squeal from the wretch compelled another shrinking glance. Some blood drops oozing piteously from the silk stocking made Cecilia's head dizzy and her heart compunctious. With a mute gesture to the limping cur, she hastened, with faltering steps, to her medicine closet, and was promptly upon her knees beside John's abashed and twitching calf.

Coates, in the meantime, having dropped five sovereigns into his grasping palm unperceived, and satisfied himself that the pup was uninjured, went up to the Squire, who still stood in dignified silence in the doorway.

"Very sorry, sir, he should disgrace himself like this. It's unaccountable. Took the leg, perhaps, for some academic distinction unknown to his experience—connected with bishops, possibly."

"Oh, indeed!" said the Squire, stiffly.

There was a lightness of speech about the young man unsuitable to chemical works.

"I'll send him back by the evening train to repent in sackcloth and ashes," said Coates, good-humouredly.

Jock's back propped against the wall, seemed to be shaking a little.

His host, however, had the honour of the house to think of, and had failed to detect a flaw in the dog.

"I beg you do nothing of the sort, Mr. Coates. The place is big enough to hold us all! And you mustn't judge all my people by that liver-hearted lout. An experiment of Mrs. Hallows' from the Burnley slums. Told her no good could come of it." The Squire's fascinated eyes refused to lift themselves from the dog's head. Instinctively his voice grew bland. "Bring him in, Mr. Coates; bring him in. Mrs. Hallows knows a good dog when she sees one. She'll give us some tea, no doubt, when she's finished coddling that poltroon's shin. I'm inclined to think, Jock, he'd beat the Slogger," said Anthony, with proud humility.

"Wipe him out, sir," said Jock, "on every point."

"I do not agree with you at all," said Cecilia, from the doorway, with prim decisiveness and a lightning glance at Anthony. "Nothing could beat the Slogger's head."

The Squire glanced less hopelessly at that which now lay against his breast.

"I believe, my dear Cecilia, I believe you're right."

"Come, Jim," said Jock, "and wash your hands."

"Where did the fellow get his hands?" groaned the Squire. "They'll be absorbing all our privileges before we know where we are. Here, Cecilia, look how the beggar can bite."

He deposited the beggar sadly upon his wife's shrinking knee. Cecilia stiffened her lip and, reflecting that matrimony calls for all one's courage, herewith underwent an exhaustive lesson in bites, heroically.

Directly the young men reappeared Coates relieved her of her burthen, with a smile so pregnant with understanding, that Cecilia decided that his hands were not the only fine things about this rugged-faced person. She felt quite glad to think the poor boy should have the pleasure of Jock's society for a little, enjoy so glorious an example, and witness a phase of life that must be as new as it was instructive to him.

"As Christians, we oughtn't to be selfish in regard to our privileges," she told herself.

"When do you start?" said James Coates, when late that evening they were together in the smoking-room.

"I don't start at all. I'm not going."

"No! What are you going to do, then?"

"Breed bullocks and exploit a mine or two."

"Or a woman!" Jock's affable grin was reassuring.

"You're taking the wrong tobacco," he murmured.

Coates took up another jar, and settled down with it in a corner away from the fire. Jock saw at a glance that his strong, delicate hands were moving nervously.

"I don't understand this."

"Not much to understand in it, after all. It's the way most of us go, isn't it?"

"That's not saying much for it. This Hinterland business was your chance."

"Oh, I daresay I'll get another." Jock was looking, not too hopefully, into the fire.

"Chances for the like of you don't hang on every bush."

Jock knew the face that was watching him well. It always reminded him that Jim, after all, was a Radical. The tolerance with which he stirred the fire did not escape Jim, who burst suddenly into a laugh that began harshly, but rounded up into a melody. It sounded as though two forces were alert and quick in the man, and the best won. The same quiet contention appeared to be going on chronically between the half-barbaric head and the fine and beautifully finished hands.

"Why don't you go?" suggested Jock.

"I? What in the name of all the furies should I want with slaughtering big game to lighten serious labour? I can swallow my pill ungilded. I have my chemical works to attend to and smell," he added, with a savage intonation. "What do you want here? You'll curse Burton before the year's out."

"No, I won't."

"The deuce you won't; no thanks to you, though. Your breeding will see to that. The thing was cut out for you. You have no imagination. You must see things for yourself, and mess about in them in your own way—a way combining amusement with instruction, that an overgrown empire provides for the likes of you. I believe it's overgrown for the sole and simple purpose of making men out of breeders of prize bullocks."

"Don't wear yourself out," pleaded Jock.

"You were ripe, too, for messing about in experience. You'd had enough of the 'Varsity. They made things too easy for you there. Never did one hour's work, and raked in everything! That sort of thing can't go on indefinitely. Time you began to swap a bit."

"Listening to you is exertion enough for the moment. Can't you smoke?"

"It's this sort of thing that handicaps you," said James, pointing his toe at a befrilled and long-dead Hal-lowes. "The sweat and the blood have been polished off every step that's led up to this and all your other decencies now for so long a time, that you've lost sight of half their significance. You don't know half their value—the significance and value either of cause and

effect. You've got into the habit of unemotional acceptance. You haven't the spur of a one-generation education, you see, to make you put keen values on things, or the yeast of recent civilisation working in your members, and the savour of a past you've forgotten for centuries reeking in your nostrils, to goad you on. Lord! wouldn't this sort of thing give some of you fellows fits! Why, even honour is so much at home amongst you, so much a part and parcel of the daily round, that it requires blood and fire and disaster to make it turn in any man Jack of you like a two-edged sword."

"Sort of thing that one would hardly hanker after, is it?"

"Wholesome, anyway. Truth is, the like of you wants space—wants to get out of the island before he can stretch himself properly, and find out something about the deadly work and the quenchless courage that's given each man the right, more or less, to his own damned insolence!"

"And whipped by his new point of view," said Jock, with a grin, "forthwith he'll fall to clutch and grab again, as it was in the beginning, and, considering all things, pretty good that for you!"

"Hang it all! I'm thinking of the good of the individual. A true republic provides for the well-being of the meanest of its members."

"We can't be always fighting for the sake of screwing the best out of the like of you. We must provide you with some other decent outlets."

"Politics."

"Sneak into the House of Commons before you've drawn a free breath unchoked with tradition and never clapped eyes upon England let loose, and for all the good you'll do or receive, you might as well join a debating society in a genteel parish."

Coates took up an old pounce-box to finger it with the relish of an artist. "It's too sleek and settled here, and too pleasant, this gentle life. You'll have grown content in two years. Your face will shine; you'll swell with the pride of fatted beasts. You'll be fit for

nothing but to crow on your own dunghill. You're beginning where you ought to end."

"If you were to see our overdraft and the things our tenants make gods of their bellies with, you wouldn't be so jolly sure of the content and the crowing."

Coates looked round at him. "You mean to tell me that it's a case of necessity?"

"Rather," said Jock, sleepily.

"Then, thank the Gods, there's some hope for you!"

Jock smoked on with calmness, but without exhilaration, while the other made a lazy inspection of sundry portraits which the Squire, in the days he lived most of his time in the room, liked to have about him.

"It's in your dead-and-gone women you score. They, more than all else, have helped England to her insolence," said James at last, with a yawn. "With all the weakness of a champagne bottle shoulder, it has its points. To look at one belonging to his own blood must, instinctively, make a man swagger a bit, to know that it never yet shrank, galled, from under a burthen. It is pleasant to feel that not one amongst your female relations had ever to sweat out her sweetness in—leather-making, for example. It's an unlovely pursuit, and plays the deuce with the shoulders."

James was still strolling round the room, pausing now and then to examine the regal pose of some powdered head, or the inimitable serenity upon some dear, dead woman's face.

"It's queer," said he, at last, "how, floating round in this sort of company, the mere fact of knowing that your own cousin, once removed, is this present moment suffering from phossy-jaw, plays the deuce with your manners. It takes all the ease and serenity out of you. You want to be up and at something. Forth, with the jawbone of an ass, to run amuck among other asses. Partridges, somehow, aren't in it. And yet if you stuck to 'em, it might be better for all concerned, maybe."

"The phossy-jaw, after all, was entirely her own fault, and making for righteousness—building up the experience that moulds the nation."

"Come and have some whiskey, Jim," said Jock, in his kind voice.

With a slight start and a quick gesture of his hands, as though he were sweeping aside a mesh of spiders' webs, James sat down.

"I wonder," he said, presently, "if you know, in the glut of your privileges, that the choicest in the place is that little step-mother of yours? She's like an old carved chest full of linen, lavender-scented and exquisite. I should be content with inaction if I could gather peace each day and a sane outlook in a linen closet fragrant with old herbs."

CHAPTER IX.

NEXT day the earth was like iron, and the air as hard and clear and sparkling as a diamond, so Jock proposed that they should walk over to Brecon Park to make arrangements for the skating.

And then Cecilia's eyes paused suddenly upon Coates' rugged head, and her heart went out to him in a bound.

"He scarce answers to one's conception," she thought, with a glimmer of prim humour, "and yet he may in very truth turn out to be the identical 'Angel unawares.'" And immediately, in her neat habit, she proceeded to docket him with the little Anstiss girl, and following the surmises which grew up as quick as gourds in her active brain, she made a list of the young lady's requirements, eminently satisfactory to herself. "I could not wish her a kindlier fate," thought Mrs. Hallowes, with devout thankfulness, her eyes resting full of confidence upon James. "He'll fit in delightfully with all her prejudices, and we can only hope that he, in his turn, may prune and correct them, possibly invest them with a little common-sense. He's an excellent young man, and rich. She will, of course, do irredeemable harm with his hard-earned wealth, but for consistency's sake, he will be constrained to think it good. Thus domestic harmony, at least, will be assured. His person, really, is quite passable," she concluded; "his smile saves him."

"You will bring me word, Jock, about little Miss Anstiss?" she asked. "I am so much afraid lest that amazingly healthy family betray her into folly. She is so sensitive to public opinion, and yet so sadly opinionated." This she said upon principle, for Jock's sake.

"Nasty combination of sensations, these! Must give her fits!" was Jock's comment.

Mrs. Hallowes would not herself have chosen this way of putting the matter, but she was glad to see that Jock was as yet in a condition to analyse in his usual language.

"We must try to make the poor child more comfortable," she continued, with renewed cheerfulness.

"I notice, Mr. Coates, that although you too are no doubt engrossed in great schemes, yet in your leisure hours you do not disdain light literature. It was quite a pleasure to see you yesterday, perusing 'A Double Event.' Perhaps you would be so kind as to select a suitable book for our little friend. On Friday I found her—I found her, poor little creature! immersed in Schopenhauer. She is really extremely pretty," she interposed, reassuringly, watching the effect of her announcement carefully. "It isn't that! It's her unfortunate surroundings."

"They must be pretty bad to drive her to that gentleman for consolation. What are they?"

James liked Mrs. Hallowes' voice, and her dread of hurting his feelings amused him oddly.

Cecilia suddenly remembered the company in which she found herself.

"She had a very lonely youth," she observed, non-committingly; "a father with an irritable liver and most peculiar views, while some of her associates were, I fear, hardly desirable."

"Got hold of, poor little fool, by a humbugging generation of anarchic vipers," began Anthony, with the amiable intention of illuminating his wife's somewhat shadowy statement. Then he also remembered.

"Your tea, ma'am, is hardly so good as usual," he murmured, with a dejected glance at his guest.

"Her father's a Radical parson at Burslem," explained Jock, obligingly. "A practical application of his political creed, considerably handicapped by a passion for Greek iambics. So you see the young lady has been sort of pitchforked into the breach, and is consequently palpitating with the consciousness of her responsibility, and likes visible sweat with a tinge of blood about it. Just now, as you may gather, she's in the hard-breathing stage, and wants to hustle us out of all our vices and institutions in a rush. She's a nice little thing, all the same, and has her doubts as to her competence for the task."

In an odd, jerky way he had, Coates pulled his brows together, and Mrs. Hallows, fearing some sudden and inexplicable laceration to his political emotions, in her most sympathetic tone, begged him to have some honey.

"I know the girl you mean," said he, when presently the two went forth into the pleasant day, the wizardry of the jewelled frost over earth and twig and branch. "She spoilt a lecture for me one day."

"What! Miss Anstiss!"

James nodded.

"They asked me down to Burslem to speak about some Factory Act. Just then I was in the holding-forth stage. It's in the marrow of our bones, you know, and that night I was in a typical condition, possessed of a sort of breaking-down force that makes one talk the darts and arrows which stir up the commotion that makes the quickness of life. It was a fine truth-seeking, image-breaking mood, and suggested several pertinent remarks to be offered upon a variety of subjects, and I had selected a fine theme, too, in my own mind, the snobbish imbecility of the mass."

"Ho!" said Jock, chuckling.

"It was not the one, if I recollect aright, selected for me by the committee. The speech, by sheer force of paradox, would have been rather witty. For that one night I could have been Aggression, with some sense of humour—a brand-new combination! I should naturally have been kicked out of every camp the next day. But I should have been heard through all the babbling din. It was the chance of a lifetime," said Coates, breaking out into his singular laugh. "And I lost it for the sake of a pair of startled grey eyes of an amazing solemnity."

"They're hazel!"

"Not they! It's the queer cloudy mottling that's put you out. They're grey moss-agates, with little feathery amber edges."

"Must have noticed them pretty closely?"

"My sight is pretty good."

"I can't see why they should shunt you off the track, all the same."

"They looked so out of place in that crowd, so terrified at what they knew and could guess, that, upon my word, I funked, adding to their pain. It would have been like planting a coal-heaver's hod upon a pair of your Jargouille shoulders. The young woman demoralised me and ruined my prospects."

"Into what did she turn your speech?" Jock's interest in the subject was getting complicated.

"Into a sort of spiritualised rechauffé of platitudes, garnished with emotion. Every woman in the place, and all the more physically undeveloped of the men were moved to tears, and they all went home as sleek as saints. It was a beautiful speech, I can tell you. Notices of it raged through the Midlands. You must have seen some of them."

"Was that the speech? Why, it moved me!"

"It moved myself, Heaven forgive me. But it wasn't what I had to say, or the beggars to hear. I was,—oh, Lord! I was the Bayard of democracy! It was the velvet glove pure and simple flapping the air with its elegant empty fingers. The iron hand was engaged in warding off fear from sloping shoulders brought up to date and apotheosed in the trim ones of Miss Joyce Anstiss. Your first regular flat-footed defeat is irritating. I could have throttled the little beast!"

Involuntarily Jock's fingers closed sharply on his palms. But remembering the other's disabilities, he at once recovered himself.

"You'll not tell her her effect upon you, will you?" he said, presently.

"Depends," said James Coates, his laugh stopping short of its customary melodious ending, his shoulders squaring with a swaggering insolence. "Depends upon how much she's worth."

Jock's face darkened. His temper, when roused, being far from heavenly, he was about to make use of language, when, with an insolence of a far more exquisite order than that of James, of a sudden he forebore.

When the silence grew too long, he broke it by remarking pleasantly: "See that hideous hump there, spoiling

the hill? It's a disused coal-mine, spoilt by the mismanagement of some idiot of a steward. I'm going to reopen it."

"The deuce you are! Excuse plain English. I've forgotten it in the original. Wasn't it Socrates who said, 'If an ass kick me, shall I strike him again?' That's the motto of all your tribe, another keynote to England's greatness, and you'd like now and then to be yourself the one who refrains."

Jock got red, but had nothing pertinent to say.

"Another secret is knowing when to hold your tongue," said James with restored good-humour. "It takes three generations, unless of course it arises from lack of brain and a vocabulary, to acquire the gift of Silence! What's the depth of the seam there, by the way? Do you happen to know?"

"I don't quite know."

"It's dug, anyway. Do you know there's iron on the place, too?"

"Iron? Where?"

"Up Foster's rise. You'll be slick into commerce, smoking the little bit of sky left clear, before you know where you are. Can you manage the Squire?"

"Rather!"

"Well, if you can't, the little white lady can. She can manage the lot of you. God bless her!" Half absently, not so much as bothering to consider if the action were peculiar or not, Coates lifted his hat. "Until such time as you begin to fatten and slacken in all your desires, you'll have your hands full. Why the deuce did they make you the only son of your father, and plank you down in a tight place! I say, Jock, exploiting mines is a costly business, you know—" But here an unprecedented diffidence took Mr. Coates, and plunged him sharp upon the possible duration of the frost. When he had threshed out this absorbing theme, Jock chipped in serenely.

"If I have to go to any one," he said, simply, "of course, it will be to you. Who on earth else would you expect me to go to?"

CHAPTER X.

WHEN a few minutes later Jock sat down beside Miss Joyce, and began to talk to her, she felt straightway as though she could never be afraid again, or tired, or in pain.

Suddenly her eyelids drooped with the languid delight of her new security. Her small nervous hands lay restful on her lap. In order to permit Schopenhauer to slip between her and the chair-back, she wriggled slightly. Not now from any craven dread of public opinion. She felt equal to devouring the tough meal in the teeth of a ball-room, but it seemed somehow unfitted to the occasion.

Notwithstanding her high sense of valour, however, she sighed, as she always did when she felt as though waxing fat and kicking, and resolved to seize the first opportunity of reparation.

It came soon.

"You'll be able to skate, then, by Monday?" said Jock, "but you'll come over, too, on Saturday, won't you? We give up the ponds to the townspeople on Saturday and Sunday, you know."

"You also feed them?" said Joyce, with a steady glance at him.

"Oh, we give them buns and things," he admitted, airily.

"Oh, so I've heard."

"You see," he explained, apologetically, "my father won't have booths so close to the house. They sell such poison," he added, on a happy inspiration, "and as they're sometimes on the ice until twelve o'clock, they must have something to warm them up, poor beggars."

She flung a look at him sublime with gravity. He gazed innocently into her eyes, and suddenly two unmistakable twinkles, the first that had ever sparkled in those orbs of serious truth, confounded him into silence.

"Buns are, I fear, not very warming upon a frosty night."

"Oh, well, we let 'em have a little elder wine," he admitted, airily.

"H'm! yes."

"And hot coffee."

"Aunt Reta was telling me to-day of the result of hot coffee on last Christmas Eve."

"It was the most awful night, and the keen air is unsteady when hot drinks are about. I must allow, however," he added, sadly, "that it was a melancholy fiasco."

"It seems almost less degrading to the unfortunate people when they are permitted to get drunk at their own expense, don't you think?"

Emboldened by the sweet, new tolerance thrilling in her tone, due entirely to a hasty glance at his own firm profile, Jock smiled discreetly. "There's some sound philosophy in that," said he.

"I—I hope you will apply it practically on Saturday."

"Joyce," said her aunt's comfortable voice, "I want to introduce Mr. Coates to you."

Joyce looked up quickly to behold, towering above her, in a beautifully cut coat and an immaculate collar, her democratic archangel!

To be caught in such a presence in an outbreak of levity! Insufferable anomaly! She flushed, paled and repented.

She moved farther from the tempter, nearer to the deliverer, and, with an ingenuity alone possible to conscientious femininity, flattened down the red rich curves of her mouth into a little hard line.

"Mr. Coates knows all about factories," pursued her aunt, "and the housing and pauperising of the poor. And he gives lectures to the intelligent middle classes. I am sure it will be a great pleasure to you to know each other."

"So glad to have got hold of your friend," said she, marching Jock off with her. "He'll be a boon to the poor little thing. They can disapprove of things in general together—more especially of us, and discuss schemes for our reformation. Sir Harry says that their party has twice the intellect of ours. I can't really see myself that it calls for a powerful intellect to be uncharitable upon

principle. For what's a Radical, after all, but a person who disapproves of every one but himself, and makes a sort of religion of it. Myself, I prefer old-fashioned Christianity. It's less wearing."

"I must say, however, Jock," she added, more leniently, "that your friend looks nice and dresses very well. If you didn't happen to know, you'd think he was quite like other people. And I hear he's painfully rich!" She sighed, and looked pensively down at her own plump, beringed pauper hands, then at her domesticated Radicals on the sofa. "Now they're happy for the moment," she proceeded, as though she were catering for the entertainment of a pair of serious wild beasts. "Let's talk of the dance. Do you know," she said, plaintively, "that, what with Sunday-school teas and teachers' suppers, and the old women's treat, there's not a moonlight night left to us."

"We'll have to trust to our lamps, then," said Jock, sympathetically, "that's all—and the sobriety of the coachman."

"And with Christmas over everything," sighed the poor lady, "that's a broken reed to trust to. Curious, Jock, isn't it, how we're always being pushed to the wall, always being called upon to give way to the people. And yet, to hear little Joyce there, you'd imagine that we had all the road, and they lay grovelling forever in the ditch."

"It's that confusing variety in other people's points of view," suggested Jock, soothingly, "and the fine stability in our own that slips us up."

"Ah! yes! It's only ourselves," said Lady Rawson, with the air of one who originates. "It's only ourselves can tell where the shoe pinches."

"By Jove! you're right there. Supposing we get on with the dance, though? We may as well enjoy ourselves so long as they leave us enough to do it on."

Jock threw a significant glance upon the amiable anarchists. His hostess wafted a soft purr of a sigh in the same direction. She was a lady well known for taking a serious interest in Imperial concerns.

While Coates had been heading through a network of furniture towards the spoiler of his chance, he felt moved by a certain fierce humour.

The unvanquished part of Mr. Coates, still aching with the vanity of the savage, took things seriously, and resented strenuously. The other—the civilised side—laughed good-humouredly, and with equal impartiality, at himself and opinion.

This small, pink bundle of hysteria, thus he summed up Miss Anstiss, had touched both sides.

She had been a stumbling-block in his path. She had forced him into making an ass of himself, in his own eyes. And as they, he could not but acknowledge, saw clearer than most men's, this, to be sure, was to be a very considerable ass indeed. He had, besides, a very especial objection to hysteria in politics. He had experienced enough of it in men otherwise sane. He had no mind to tackle a rendering of it, unfamiliar to him, in an unfamiliar sex, that seems, as a class, incapable of concentrating its insanity upon one object, as men can do, specialising it, so to speak. With them, it tinges everything. Oddly enough, it was the trait that embarrassed Jock, which disarmed James—the lady's ignorance of her Divine Right.

Now, in the presence of this angelic visitor, Miss Joyce felt ready to offer up for incense upon his shrine both intellect and will—and this amiable alacrity was patent upon her ingenuous countenance.

The humour and the pathos in the attitude as applied to him, struck Coates grotesquely. He laughed half under his breath, and sat down beside her.

"I have hoped to meet you," said Joyce, softly, "ever since that evening you spoke at the Hall at Burslem."

"Oh, you liked the speech, then?"

"Liked it! Since I heard it, everything, I think, has been a little different."

James' mouth repressed a prompting to whistle, firmly.

"You had," she went on, still the gentle reverence in her voice, "hard truths to deliver—but you—you

shrouded them in loving-kindness, and in spite of truth, you sent us all home with hope in our hearts!"

"Oh, Lord!" thought James, "it's worse than I thought; she's got Bayard into her head. Still, once you venture into words, you're apt to run a mucker."

He meant to say something else, but looking at her eyes, dim with a child's devotion, put him out.

"It is sometimes difficult to be true and sincere also." Her voice was low, and it faltered. It touched him annoyingly. "You were both."

"You couldn't be absolutely insincere, you know, with a sea of unsatisfied faces looking to you to do something—the something you can never do—for them," said James, hastily, feeling oddly humble. "But you can make a mistake."

"Can you?" she said, with an unconscious, incredulous little accent on the "you." "Your coming that night was like—the blowing of a fresh breeze into our fetid lives."

The girl was undoubtedly confusing!

"I came not to send peace, but a sword," he murmured to himself, half-absently.

But Joyce's ears, trained to Bible platitudes, caught the words.

"What?" she cried, in a stifled tone.

James laughed outright.

"I beg your pardon. I ought really to have remembered that you must still be in a state of revolt against the four Gospels."

"Oh!"

"But, after all, He was the best iconoclast we've had, wasn't He—the gentlest, the sanest, and by far the most honest?" She stared, breathless.

"If ever again I catch myself pandering to a pair of grey eyes," thought James, "I'm a Dutchman, that's all!"

"He would never have been betrayed into crying 'Peace, when there was no peace.' He had the courage of his opinions, anyway."

This was as incomprehensible to her as it was disappointing. She plunged into excusing. "It—it was the

sadness on the white faces that made you say what you did, and—and I'm glad."

"Then you oughtn't to be glad. And it wasn't the white faces at all, by the way. It was—the thought of a girl's eyes. I didn't like to hurt—an ideal—with too much rough fact. It's a brutal sort of thing and—throttles hope—unless you can look ahead of it to time. This—girl—couldn't."

"Did she tell you?"

"Not she. I found out by her eyes."

Still she stared. And of a sudden she forgot his mission, and thought only of him.

"It was—I suppose it was Girl in the Abstract?" she asked, courageously.

"Well, yes! She was Abstract girl—more or less."

Joyce wrenched herself from him to his mission.

"I understand your difficulty. We have to be so careful with the young. It is hard to be both true and kind."

"Under some circumstances," said James, with a low laugh, "it would be only too easy."

"Ah! It's always easy to slur things—to—to make truth palatable," said she, her eyes away in The Higher Life. "She robbed us of your best."

"You wouldn't like my best, Miss Anstiss; it would worry you to death. It would make you detest me."

"You!" said Joyce, with magnificent scorn, gazing past him into the Infinities. How trivial seemed the personal point of view! How presumptuous! "That surely has nothing to do with it. We're talking of vital things."

"Oh!" said James, meekly, "so we are."

Here Jock's careless laugh drew her eyes from James, and she felt moved by an odd bewilderment.

He was so restful, this other, so soothing. When she looked at him, she wanted to be just happy and laugh and be idle! Had she dared to give way to her feebleness, just to begin with, she would have preferred him idle also!

To be the moving impulse to so mighty a latent force

has its attractions. To purge so engaging a spirit of dross; to centralise its resources; utilise its yearnings; purify its politics; arouse its ambitions; above all, to direct them! Oh! glorious outlet for conscientious effort!

And all the time to rest under the shadow of his strength! Forget the sorrow of the whole world in the sun of his smile!

It was an entrancing vision, which would considerably have astonished Jock.

A sudden note of some remote unsoundness in some promise struck Joyce sharply. She felt as though she ought to be saying, in a general sort of way, "Get thee behind me, Satan."

Involuntarily she turned to Coates.

How much less soothing an object, but how much more bracing! Joyce sighed, and averted ears and eyes from Jock, amidst his merry group.

"Until you put it in the way you did," said Joyce, "I had not known how kinship with the people draws you to them with—with hooks of steel."

James remembered the phrase and squirmed.

"I had thought," said she, wistfully; "I had hoped that one might learn as much from a little distance. They all thought it so nice of you." She paused, flushing.

"Not to mind saying that my mother had been a mill-hand," said James, coolly. "Well, I dare say you're right in putting that somewhat damning fact to my credit. The circumstance, after all, makes the virtue, and not to be ashamed of his mother may, upon occasion, be accounted unto a man for righteousness."

Standing up, he put out one foot and thrust his hands in his pockets, as though he purposed marching through the room. In sundry of the drawing-rooms of local commerce, had he chosen, which he never did, he had a free hand. Certain Liberal hostesses of his acquaintance practised tolerance as an art, and expected energetic movement on the part of the fresh-caught. But here! He grinned. Involuntarily his attitude adapted itself to county requirements.

"This little butterfly of a democrat makes you speak the truth," he thought. "Pity she'll insist upon getting herself hurt."

"It's a factor in our education, this sort of thing," he resumed. "A temptation we've got to overcome. A fine, rousing experience, conducive to ultimate salvation." He extricated his hands from their depths and laughed. "Seems churlish, doesn't it, to make a monopoly of it! Picture, for example, what Jock Hallowes would grow to with this sort of dragon to fight." He glanced at Lady Rawson's smooth back seams, and laughed again. Then turned back to Joyce. "Ha! you've given it up, I see. Small blame to you! I remember yielding once to this temptation. My mother's as good as gold, but she looks inextinguishably rich, and at my first commemoration at Oxford, I was heartily ashamed of her."

Joyce murmured something vague about youth.

"Ah! That's nice of you. And you're right in a measure. Even grand-fathered youth can be a bit snobbish. But in them snobbery takes rather less mean and ugly forms, I fancy."

In the throbbing silence that ensued, Coates watched the rapid play of honest emotions upon the lovely little face with delight. But the words that must inevitably result he awaited in calm despair.

"Serves me right, after all," he thought. "Why did I mislead the infant mind with that speech. With the curse of oratory in your blood and bone, you can't be rigidly honest. I believe that's the truth of it. I wonder when she'll begin."

Joyce was wondering when she could. She was faint with a horrifying doubt. Her head seemed to be whizzing.

"But in your heart you believe the principles you profess. You believe in progress, in—in the necessity for the reorganisation of—of—everything. You care for the people. You do care?"

She was suddenly bewildered anew by the sincerity and sweetness of his smile, by the gentler kindness in his voice.

He might—he might have been Jock !

“If a man gets hot every time he thinks of the conditions in which women of his family have been forced into living, ever since the family began—you know something of these conditions, Miss Anstiss?—by sheer force of nature he must be a Radical. The people are kith and kin to you. You must, in loyalty, stand by them, shoulder to shoulder.”

“You care for the people?” she persisted.

“I think I understand their griefs,” he said, slowly, narrowing his eyes queerly, “and how they take them. I know I understand their temptations. Haven’t I given you a blatant illustration? I understand a little of their wants and a good deal of their regrettable methods of securing them. I know just enough of *my* people not to idealise them. To be able to do that, you must be privileged to use the—the——”

“You will help them, at least?” she said, sadly.

“Why, naturally. I’m of them and amongst them, but I can do precious little in the time.”

“But you filled us with hope.”

“In what did the hope result?”

“It cleared the smoke and chillness and—and sorrow out of our hearts,” she said, flushing painfully. “It showed us—the—the lining to the cloud. We hardly ever see it over there.”

Her deprecating, childlike face and voice touched James in the wounding, rending way this sort of thing always touched him.

“There’s nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so,” he said, softly. “Shall I go on making beautiful speeches and put them down amongst the other appliative measures? One more or less matters but little.”

“Why, why do you talk like this?”

“I’m inclined to think it’s Non-conformist conscience bent upon improving the occasion in suggesting to you not to run your head against fences, or impale yourself needlessly upon stakes. It’s your fault; you aroused the beast. And the first rule in life is to let sleeping dogs lie!”

Joyce's eyes swept the room. "It's their rule!"

"We can borrow even from an enemy. See how sunny their hearts keep? The march is so slow, and it's made up of a lot of long waits, so it's just as well to enjoy yourselves during the waits, while things are ripening, you know. You can't force social reforms in hot-houses as you can spring peas. Like everything else, they must follow the law of growth. Meanwhile you could be looking up and watching, full of belief, for the golden lining. If you watch long enough, other eyes will follow. It's no use telling a generation of dissecting investigators to hope; that's hopeless. Just make them lift up their eyes. It's only women who can do that."

"It's only another way of telling me to be idle and enjoy myself. They all do it—my aunt, my cousins, in batches and singly! My uncle, old Mr. Hallowes, even Mr. Hallowes, and now you. I—I didn't expect it of you!"

"Ha! Has Jock been advising you?" He swung round, with a quick, short laugh, to look at Jock, who happened at the moment to be looking at Joyce. "You can't do better, then, than follow his lead," he said, turning back to her, a subtle alteration in his whole face. "He'll lead you straight as a die."

"Mr. Hallowes is certainly setting out in life with the frank intention of enjoying himself," said Joyce, primly.

"To enjoy yourself, and make every man, woman, and child that comes near you do the same, besides doing your best for each of them, without bothering about ultimates—that's the highest rule of life, and, unconsciously, it's Jock Hallowes'."

"But it's not yours," she cried, in spite of herself.

"That's want of development. I've not reached that level. I'm engaged in helping myself up by picking holes in my betters for a foothold."

"And sacrificing yourself. As if we hadn't heard of you! Imagine Mr. Hallowes sacrificing himself!" Her voice trembled with scorn.

"He does it, as a matter of course, every day, in the little things. Perhaps you wouldn't believe it, but just

now he's doing it on quite a big scale. The word, however, as applied to himself, would amuse him considerably."

"I don't understand you," she said, her eyes wide and indignant.

That a god, alas! should make so little of himself! It was so unlike their habits!

"It's the turbidity of my mind. It's more to the purpose, that you should understand Jock Hallows. His mind is a limpid stream, running through a fair garden. Just the sort of mind a girl should be at home in."

"Is—is mockery in the very air?"

"There was never a man yet who would mock at Jock Hallows, much less at you."

"Oh!" said Joyce, protestingly, as every one of her thoughts slid off to Jock.

Whereupon it seemed to her as though she had shirked a difficult climb.

"Shall we go over to them?" said James. "Their party sounds alluring."

"And that's two words for Jock and one for myself," thought Mr. Coates, when she had obeyed him mutely. "And unless I look out, this sincere little idiot will be playing the deuce with my life, just as she did with my lecture. She'd do far better to interrupt Jock, and so should I."

CHAPTER XI.

"OH! James," said Mrs. Coates, with an apologetic gasp, "how heated you are! Whatever have you been doing?"

Twenty-eight years ago, the lady would have said "eaten," but just after the birth of James she fell to making efforts, and the H was the first dragon overcome. Since that time her life had been one grand act of self-abnegation, and all she suffered, all she did or left undone, was accomplished or omitted solely and entirely for the benefit and glorification of James Joseph Coates—during the radiant intervals of the holidays, and later, in sure and certain hope of that blessed day when, with developed intelligence and shining with the polish of the best schools and colleges, he should return to her for good.

She had laboured towards civilisation under the disadvantage of an unambitious husband who preferred work to parlour tricks, and had moreover herself a constitutional objection to the law of exclusion. To shut the door upon an old friend was a height to which, with all her striving, Mrs. Coates never attained. She was a stout, pillowy, comfortable creature, built for prosperous content. The haggard note of interrogation apparent in her amiable eyes was at first sight disturbing. It suggested a kindly porpoise in trouble about its soul.

It was now about nine o'clock, the breakfast hour at Hurley Grange, but early though it was, Mrs. Coates would have liked dearly to sail down her oaken stairs encased in a sound black silk that could have stood alone, with a twenty-carat gold chain zigzagging across her breast. In this costume she could, she felt, be at home. The dearest dream of her girlhood, when her own old Jim still sat in his shirt-sleeves, had been to wear the best black silk the first thing in the morning, and to cast each gown before the seams got shiny.

But her London dress-maker knew better than this. She had triumphantly clothed her docile client in a blue cloth gown with a tinge of purple in it, some of its tones matching exactly with certain little thready streaks in Mrs. Coates' own round cheeks. The vest of this garment shone with little greenish wafery ornamentations that always made stars dance before the tired eyes of the managers and their subs when, in a big crisis of work, James brought them home to lunch.

Her coarse, abundant, iron-grey hair was rolled up into bristly rolls upon her temples. In her secret soul—Mrs. Coates suffered acutely from Doubts—these erections reminded her painfully of a corrugated iron fence, and the day she was deprived of her nice straight parting and her real lace caps she cried bitterly. She was a heroic woman, however, and used to effort. She persevered.

Both her dress-maker and coiffeur had been recommended to her by the Conservative Member's wife, a lady with large unpaid bills and a sense of humour.

Upon the news of a serious explosion in his works, James, accompanied by Jock, had come over the day before. He had been up all night, hard at work, and was a good deal worried. He had grown used, besides, to the privileges of the absent-minded. He hardly heard his mother, and made no sign at all of answering her. But his eyes presently happening to stray towards her, he perceived the outrageous gewgaws shivering with repressed agitation over her emblazoned tea-pot.

James roused himself at once. "It's been pretty hard work," he explained, gently, giving her all his attention.

"C-couldn't you leave it to the managers, James?"

The timid stumble which, ever since the day upon which his mustache first became visible to the naked eye, heralded in each conversation, annoyed James horribly. Nervous and tired after his harassing night, he jerked up one shoulder in a way Mrs. Coates had known only too well in those days before her son had learned self-control.

"I suppose I could," he said. "They are quite trustworthy. But it's a more serious business than usual, this explosion. There's no apparent cause for it. We

must find out definitely how it came about. Just lately I've been going in rather for chemical analysis, and Morton, I find, is a bit rusty."

"You pursue your classical studies also, do you not, James?" His eyes flashed a quick, amused glance at her.

"I've done my duty to the Classics in my time, mother. Just now I find Chemistry more to the point."

Bringing suggestions for the boy's good into a conversation always tried Mrs. Coates dreadfully. She had an ineradicable tendency to get physically warm over things, and although James had never mentioned it, she felt sure he did not care to see her fanning herself with her pocket-handkerchief.

"The honourable Mrs. Carew says the Classics is such a gentlemanly study," she ventured, jingling her bangles nervously.

"Pity the Honourable Mrs. Carew doesn't impress that fact upon her own lout! Been ploughed three times for Mods."

"Oh, James, she says it's his spirit."

"H'm! that's what she says, is it?"

Drawing so long a breath that her whole bodice creaked piteously, Mrs. Coates plunged in upon her point.

"James, dear, before Mr. Hallowes comes in, I wish you'd tell me if it's true that it's only ungentlemanly young men—b—bounders, you know, who do chemistry?" James laughed oddly.

"So the Honourable Mrs. Carew's been giving you lessons in 'Varsity etiquette. A bounder or so may stray into a laboratory, and often does, just as his counterpart may dip into the pages of a classical author; but to equalise matters, there's been a real Earl—nothing between him and a Dukedom but two rickety children—messaging round in my laboratory this last month or so, and to show you the seriousness of his investigation, he has blown up six retorts and ruined my ceiling, to say nothing of burning off one ducal eye-brow and ruining his nails. So cheer up, dear, and give me some coffee. Jock will be here directly."

"Such a nice young man," she murmured; "so affable.

I wish, James, dear, you could have seen your way—hem!—conscientiously to being a Conservative. It is so gentlemanly. I *would* like to hear you speak at the Primrose League."

James continued, passively, to devour bacon. It was so nice and homely to see him enjoying his food, instead of wool-gathering after glass bottles, that Mrs. Coates felt as if she could say a little thing or two to him. The Honourable Mrs. Carew had been saying a good deal more than that to her. And the style of her hats, and her voice like music! And the way she interested herself in James, and kept sending him invitations contrasted with the atrocious way in which he refused them! He was always making jokes, too, about Mrs. Carew's want of coherence, he was that particular about dealing with things in their order, was James.

Repressing an inclination to twiddle her thumbs—upon his return from his first term at school, James, a little snob of a boy, had commented upon the habit—Mrs. Coates began to collect her thoughts in order to seriously address him. She gazed dejectedly at an odd look about his mouth that always puzzled her, and accentuated within him the necessity for sorting out her reflections. Being a Radical certainly kept James down, she thought, and did no good to any one. He could be just as kind to the poor and as anxious to change their laws as a Conservative as he was as a Radical. The Conservatives would give him every convenience for indulging his queer tastes and humours, she had made sure of that.

He could say all he had to say at respectable Primrose meetings just as well as at low Radical halls, and to a nice, washed audience, who would at once recognise the fact of his being a college man, and would give him medals and invitations instead of pelting him with rotten eggs and carrots, as she had seen done more than once to the poor boy by the very people he was breaking his heart to serve, if he happened to tell them things they were not used to. And if Radicalism could not keep James from telling people things they were not used to, what could?

She had herself suffered tortures before she finally decided to change her party. It had been nearly as bad as turning from church to chapel.

At first sight, there was a meanness about the act. It was like kicking the plank that carried you over. Sustained, however, by the best advice, she had done her duty, and for reward found that, so long as you held your tongue and gave the right subscriptions, you might think what you pleased. Which comes indeed of mixing with polite people!

When she came to think of it calmly—doing the thing, there was no denying it, had hurt badly, and James' behaviour during the process had kept her in a continual perspiration. But once done in a political turn, you experience in your internal sensations no change whatsoever. The thing is grossly exaggerated. Indeed, Mrs. Coates found no difference whatsoever in anything save the quality of her company. And yet as she now gazed at James, she sighed.

The first great move of her life—the chapel one—with a shrewd premonition of the ways of men (she was up to all the tricks of babies!), she had accomplished before James had power to make her hot. But neither in this or the next—the political move—did any thought of self ever trouble the limpid mind of Mrs. Coates.

In what did parties and politics concern her, or religion either? So long as you live respectable, and take care that your servants do the same, and keep from Rome and the devil, God is as near you in church as in chapel!

It was all for James' good—all.

And yet, what were you to do with a lad who would not be done good by?

In the middle of the Honourable Mrs. Carew's remarks about the holy side to Jingoism—Mrs. Coates did not like to ask if it were Latin or Greek—didn't he go off about the tenacity of the shark? And though Mrs. Carew had laughed, she did not like it in the least. And just to show what James was, the very same day he went on like this in the drawing-room, had she not found him sitting on a melon frame arguing with the gardener, the

one with the wild eye who wanted to blow up the Queen, as though he were a lord.

"You might lay down your life for James, and if he was not the best lad who ever wore shoe leather, he'd be making you blush."

As was frequently the case when Mrs. Coates thought of her son apart from politics, her eyes were bright with tears.

James was eating his breakfast steadily, but he knew all, both about the eyes and the congested reflections.

All of a sudden his mother started violently. She remembered that she had not yet uttered a word. She felt a traitor to her cause. And this sort of thing was now constantly happening.

"Now, mother," said James, "you've not touched your egg. It's stone cold. See, I'm boiling a fresh one for you. By the way, Jock Hallowes and I are going over to dine with the Carews to-night."

"To dine, James!"

"One of old Carew's nephews was at Christ's with us. He's a nice little chap."

Mrs. Coates' breast heaved tumultuously. She felt moreover that there was better to come, and it never did to urge James.

"And would you send over early to ask them all to dinner to-morrow? It's a short notice, but Mrs. Carew knows we have got to get back, and she said they would come all right."

"Oh, James!" She wiped the palms of her hands furtively.

"I'm so thankful we are settled with footmen!"

"James," she said presently, looking dreadfully hot, "will you see before you go if the note is right? And perhaps you would not mind casting your eye over the menu, my dear?"

James felt a little hot himself.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, dear. I'll make a little copy of the note for you, and I'll get Burger to dragon your cook, and keep things square. You said you were not sure of her, and Burger couldn't make a mistake if he tried. He's been a chef in his day."

When, in consequence of an urgent message, James had to return to the works, but not before he had written the note, Mrs. Coates seized the opportunity to have a little quiet talk with his friend.

The household at Faldeholm had a peculiar interest for Mrs. Coates, and caused her less anxiety than did any of the other county houses at which James visited. A little old maid used to nothing but sick rooms could not be much of a mistress for a big place like that, and probably nagged the men folks. James had not so much as mentioned her!

There was not a spark of jealousy in Mrs. Coates' heart in regard to any future girl whom James might delight to honour. She could bend head and knees before her without a murmur or one thought of bitterness. She was ready and willing to creep away out of her path and just look on and rejoice in the distance, with full heart, over James' happiness—so long, of course, as she was "the best article in the market."

Who was she compared to the queen whom alone James could choose!

Though she were to treat her as the dirt beneath her feet, yet because James would worship her, she must perforce do so likewise!

The girls in the enchanted mansions in which James roamed free, troubled her not at all. But it was another story altogether with the mothers.

Those radiant and glittering beings who recognised her occasionally from their carriages, and treated her with marked graciousness at the Primrose meetings, who sprung from a lovely youth to a majestic old age, bounding across the unspeakable gulf of middle age with an agility that struck Mrs. Coates, considering their languid airs, as little short of miraculous. It was these who tortured and confounded the mother of James. They were so inexpressibly unlike herself!

It was exhilarating to find James at home in a house whose mistress had enjoyed a middle age as seemly and devout and dull as though she had come of business folk, and had to wait till over sixty for a husband.

Although she felt sorry that so fine a young man as Mr. Hallows should be thus afflicted, Mrs. Coates yet sighed with devout satisfaction.

"You have a step-mother I hear, Mr. Hallows?" she remarked, sympathetically.

"I have the nicest little step-mother you ever met. You would like each other most awfully."

Mrs. Coates' jaw dropped, but she summoned sufficient self-control to murmur, "Now! fancy!"

But perhaps he was putting the best face on a bad business.

"I daresay she keeps herself retired?" she ventured, interrogatively. "James never mentioned her."

"That's odd, then; for James cherishes a discreet passion for my step-mother!"

"Oh!" said James' mother, blankly, "does she manage well?"

"I wonder if she does! It is a word you could not apply to her somehow. Everything goes beautifully since she came. It was a bear garden before; and you don't quite know how it all happens, but it must be her, of course. James says she reminds him of an old chest full of exquisite linen. I think she is more like an old jar of pot-pourri. You hardly know it is there. All the same, it changes everything."

Whereupon Jock strolled off to the stable to ride down after James, whistling merrily as he went.

But Mrs. Coates went up quietly to her room and had a little lonely cry.

CHAPTER XII.

MEANWHILE the fact of an Archangel and a Man having become by force of circumstance almost in the same hour the objects of her astonished speculations, was bringing to Joyce much confusion and dizziness of mind. And as though this were not enough, she was likewise being beset and buffeted by a minor woe fraught with levity.

Every poor little dream of joy seemed to be rounded up with a nightmare for Joyce.

She could not dance in step! Through all her distracting digressions she had nevertheless not failed to drink in snatches of the intoxicating babble concerning the ball, and as she listened every drop of her blood would fall to dancing in her veins, but her feet, alas! could only shuffle vaguely.

A sort of reluctant, breathless wistfulness visible just now in Joyce's demeanour interested men. It looked to their carnal vision as though Principle, after some unfamiliar fashion, was being tempered by Natural Desire.

But it annoyed women. The attitude was far too becoming to be in any way associated with nature. And in spite of Principle, had not Joyce already arrested the attention of their two newest men?

A girl so rigid, with a sense of duty and the shortcomings of society, might, in common decency, have confined herself to the curate, the bald-headed adorer, or one of the Rejected Squad. There were several examples of each of these great natural divisions in the district. They indeed had their uses; they filled in inevitable niches during the off season; but when anything happened to be going on, were sadly in the way. Any fresh outlet, therefore, for the activity of these embarrassing supernumeraries, was kindly welcomed. In this regard, Joyce, at the very start, had unwittingly offended. The amount of pains and patience devoted by the un-

happy gentlemen to the pursuit of scoffing indifference, had, to be sure, surprised Joyce, and aroused within her a compassion, but in no sort of way did it tend to recommend them to her personally.

The Rawson girls, happy, out-of-door creatures, brimming with health, assured prosperity, a blessed absence of nerves, and the absorbing delight of their own current affairs, could hardly be expected to find much tolerance for any unfamiliar type. They had been thankful, certainly, to find it presentable. The composite product of a factory town Radical with a liver, and any one feeble enough to have selected such a combination, conjured up for them by their obliging imaginations, was so appalling, that they accepted the outward fitness of Joyce generously, and were glad that their mother should clothe it accordingly.

It was the egoism of Joyce which they detested. It was so peculiarly, blatantly unlike their own. A rational, soothing sort of thing, theirs, that flowed along easily, and disturbed no one's serenity, besides knowing quite clearly what it wanted. Joyce's went in jerks, and wobbled, and she had odd habits, moreover. Her way of staring with wide eyes was bad, but since this arose probably from the poor thing's never having met any decent people before, one could only be sorry for her!

But there was no excuse at all for her impertinent disapproval of sport and disbelief in orthodox religion. These things simply were vulgar.

There was, therefore, as was but natural, a trace of passing resentment concerning Joyce afloat in the air, the consequence being that her delicate little presence was passed over and almost forgotten, except by kind old Lady Rawson, who ordered a ball dress for her, and was pleased that her ankle would be well for the occasion; also that she made no resistance to the plans for her entertainment.

So prepared had the lady been for counter arguments, that she had unearthed an old sermon of the rector's dealing with the devotion lying discreetly at the foot of all dancing, beginning with the ark of David and forging

through many obstacles triumphantly forward to the present day.

Lady Rawson had much to attend to, and was constantly forgetting that Joyce's opinions as to things in general did not rest upon religious grounds.

She would have been thankful enough had they done so. In that case she could have handed her over to the rector, a wide-minded, motherly-hearted divine, who knew nothing of Effort indeed, but liked girls to enjoy themselves. As it was, Joyce would merely have worried him to death; possibly have put things into his head. She had pretty ways, and the rector, poor man! was led a good deal by sight.

Meanwhile Joyce was striving hard to forget the pain of her ignorance and to fix her mind upon Higher Things.

Higher Things, naturally enough, concentrated themselves in the Archangel.

Having reached a level thus lofty, Joyce's eyes might have rested there, and her feet found peace, had not the incomprehensible Symbol been there, actively engaged in fixing up the electric light for the better convenience of the band.

She tried to put this untoward zeal down to interest in scientific pursuits, but wobbling in her conviction, stumbled back upon Jock, and forthwith her very heart began to dance and her feet to shrink with fear, while in the stress of affairs it had occurred to no one to ascertain if she knew so much as a discreet quadrille, until one day, as she was passing her room, Betty was startled to hear the low humming of a waltz tune and a tiny patter of sound. She paused to wonder.

Joyce had a fascinating little voice, very young and sweet and true, and also a little thin. It was like the voice of a sedge-warbler, but to hear it in a waltz tune was an amazement. Betty had little imagination, but she was bursting with curiosity. She knocked softly, and receiving no answer, without further ado she opened the door and in she bounced to see Joyce, her bicycle skirt lifted daintily, her eyes like dreams, practis-

ing the waltz steps in front of a long mirror. So absorbed was she, that for several minutes she did not perceive Betty, unaffectedly staring. A chuckle recalled her to earth.

"Betty! Oh! Betty!" she entreated, with a horrible premonition. But Betty by this time was half-way down the stairs. Joyce could hear the clapping of her soft hands, the low ring of her laugh, she could hear the joyous burst open of the drawing-room door, and with that she dropped down on the side of her bed and began to shudder.

It was a beautiful story, and Betty told it very well. Given something to go upon, she had a gift for dramatic description and her teeth and eyes could flash like diamonds.

Mrs. Hallowes, who had come over to see how things were shaping, watched her with a sort of shrinking, fascinated shame. For all of a sudden an hour in her own youth, when she, too, had danced before an old mirror, came springing towards her out of the past. Thrusting aside her egoism, she glanced at James. He looked yellow and singularly unpleasant. She felt quite satisfied. Then her bright, indignant eyes darted to Jock. He was leaning against the mantel-piece, looking through half-closed, lazy eyes at Betty. He might have been Jove, half aware of the presence of an insect.

Cecilia's heart swelled with pride. He looked so incomparably superior to the other poor young man. Suddenly she started, and certain kindly thoughts which had been trembling in her brain stiffened and froze there. She clasped her hands upon her knees firmly, and hardened her heart.

"This is a crucial moment," she assured herself, sternly, "and I have Jock to consider. I must not be weak."

She was growing strong to the point of inexorability, when Jock lifted himself straight and flung upon her a comprehensive and imperious glance.

And then Cecilia forgot Anthony's interests, Jock's good, and her own duty, and was conscious only of the ecstatic fact that Jock was appealing to her for aid in a

righteous cause. She listened, with gathering calm, to the laughter, and then she went over to Lady Rawson.

"I want you to lend me your little niece for a few days; that is, if she will come to me," said Cecilia, unblushingly. "I want to practise a pet fad of my own on her poor ankle. You know my failing! and—won't you be generous and allow me to keep her until after the party? You have four girls to make beautiful for the occasion. You might spare me the fifth."

"Indeed, Mrs. Hallowes, I shall be only too delighted!" cried the poor lady. "Betty, my dear child, run and tell your cousin of this kind invitation." But Mrs. Hallowes' face was set firmly towards the door.

"May I not go up myself and plead my cause?"

The little hunted look with which Joyce met her completed the demoralisation of Mrs. Hallowes, due no doubt to the fact that Mrs. Hallowes after all was only a mock-mother!

"Jock must be my first consideration," she reflected, craftily. "At the same time, it is not possible entirely to ignore common humanity. But it is a risk! Her idiosyncrasies removed, there is the making of a slave in that girl, and Jock has primitive promptings!"

She laid her hand in such a way on Joyce's shoulder that it rested there like a kiss.

"My dear little girl!" said this faithless shepherd of man, "I want you to come home with me!"

Joyce turned and looked up in her face.

"I should like to go home with you," she said, after a pause.

Had the deliverer appeared but one little hour earlier, Joyce had declined with shy decision. She was sensitively conscious of the subtle barrier between Mrs. Hallowes and herself, and as yet she was too self-conscious to care to venture into the same house with two men whom she took with such simple seriousness. A close and intimate contact with creatures who made you so very anxious could hardly be an acutely enjoyable prospect, but every other point of view was swallowed up in that of Betty as dramatic story-teller.

"And will you stay with me until after the dance? I have never dressed a girl for her first ball yet; so you can give me a very great pleasure."

With an odd, quick, little movement, not like her, Mrs. Hallowes plucked her hand from Joyce's soft, warm shoulder. A sharp thought of the curious number of dead she had dressed for the grave had suddenly smitten her, and although she prayed daily against morbidity, certain ghoulish details of her ministering life had a horrid way of pursuing Mrs. Hallowes.

"Do you mean to say that you're going to dress me yourself?"

Upon a sudden, inexplicable, unaccustomed impulse, Joyce added, as though out of a soft dream: "Then I believe I should really feel like a real girl with a real place in the real world. Now, I feel—I feel like an intruder in—several worlds, and they're all unreal!"

She flushed, apologetically, "Oh! but you wouldn't understand?"

"Oh! but I would! Must I remind you again of all the years I have lived picking up understanding, always in spite of myself, as I went? You see, I have always had to go rather slowly! And now, how long will you be packing?"

"Not ten minutes!"

Cecilia's hand was on the bell.

"Oh! don't, please! My aunt's maid is—is rather confusing."

"Don't crumple your things, then, with hurry. I have still ever so many things to say to your aunt, so I'll go down and say them."

Instead of falling to upon her packing, Joyce stood still to think of her visitor in her delicate greys—this strange mixture, who had spent all her long years in hot rooms nursing the sick, yet whose eyes glowed and grew young at the mere thought of dressing a girl for her first ball!

Joyce's points of view were getting all blurred and mixed up. As she knelt down in a flurry to pack, she tried to collect them and lay them in their order as she

did her soft white garments of linen and lace. It hurt and offended her serious mind that an order brought into it by thought, both weighty and complex, should be disturbed by trifles lighter than air.

Before the great potters, Love and Pain, have laid hold upon the young heart of a girl, tempered neither by hockey nor cricket nor the alchemy of the open air, it is a stiff and stubborn thing and clings, burr-like, to First Principles, which it is apt to confound with Points of View, and when these artless and unimportant quantities become dislodged, perforce, in her, and float, if she is very conscientious, she will tremble a little and be afraid.

It hurts and offends her sense of strength that she should be breaking up in this astonishing way. The swelling of the little buds hurts her, and she knows nothing yet of the gentle beauty and blessedness of the unfolding leaves.

From the wistfulness of Joyce's face, while she was saying good-bye to her cheerful relatives, she might have been a little girl going forth upon a long journey. The relatives laughed amusedly. But Cecilia's thoughts flew back to her own youth, and returned winged with understanding. The consequence was that, in putting Joyce right with her own proud young mind, Mrs. Hallowes never recollected until she was half up the avenue that this untimely visitor had still to be explained to the Squire.

It must not be supposed that Anthony was so remiss in foresight and wanting in parental affection as not to have ascertained from Sir Harry all the coherent facts concerning his niece of which that gentleman was capable. And these had focussed themselves upon Anthony's receptive brain into one fixed impression.

This was a new departure in minxes—a creature with an intellect, who jabbered politics when she ought to be mending her stockings!

Upon the principle that the devil you know is better than the devil you don't know, the Squire kept carefully away from Brecon Park, and having mastered every

detail in regard to the young person's complexion, eyes, figure, and dimples, he proceeded to take observations upon Jock and to strengthen this young man's mind with the aggregate mass of experience concerning abstract woman, arrived at through much tribulation—upon the part of others.

To make this latter fact quite clear, called for Anthony's ingenuity. To purge the subject victoriously of all trace of personal suffering, and yet in nowise to detract from its poignant application to one made in like image to himself, filled the Squire's time agreeably, and, as a gout-corrective, could hardly be equalled.

Mrs. Hallöwes glanced at the girl, her hat blown back, her soft hair ruffled up around her head like a halo, and took courage. She had in her time explained more difficult things than Joyce. The girl carried all the arguments necessary to explain herself to a world of men nestled in one dimple.

Cecilia looked again, paused, and sighed. She only wished she could explain her presence in that carriage as comfortably to her own conscience.

"Now, Miss Anstiss," said she, as soon as she had put Joyce into a big chair near the fire, "here is a book. It is sure to be good. Mr. Coates has been laughing over it the whole morning. I am going to bring Mr. Hallöwes to see you."

"Oh! thank you!" said Joyce, with prim politeness.

Joyce sat up straight and prepared to meet this amiable gentleman who continually played ducks and drakes with his responsibilities; this byword of an obsolete type; this ravening stumbling-block; this scourge at every meeting. The very name of Anthony Hallöwes was enough to make even a Conservative smile and puff out his own progressive chest.

After his second glass of wine, Sir Harry always grew hopeless over poor Anthony, until the third sent him prancing off upon the hunting prospects and the rise in the price of hunters. He was a breeder himself, in a modest way.

When Mrs. Hallöwes reached the library, she found

Anthony beside the fire culling and classifying examples of feminine depravity, also to some extent transposing them. For Anthony, in spite of a bold taste, was possessed of a fine perception.

Following her usual habit, Cecilia sat down and warmed her hands. She always felt that news of a doubtful character should not be conveyed to a sitting man, the woman standing. It arouses in him a sense of flurried jerkiness, and to jar a sensitive masculine mind needlessly, appeared to Cecilia almost like jostling a helpless infant—an altogether unnecessary and unproductive cruelty.

"I have been over to the Rawsons," said Cecilia. "Anthony, do you know, I think—I hope," she added quickly, "that Mr. Coates admires little Miss Anstiss a good deal. I think I should like it!"

She neglected to specify what "it" meant, but Anthony knew what she was after. He pushed up his spectacles, planked Aristotle's face down upon the table, and turned his attention to the turbidity of the immediate woman.

"Ah! now you're happy riding off on a purely feminine instinct, and forgetting every important point. I think it damned cheek on the part of the fellow so much as to look at the girl—with intentions!"

"Ah, well! his youth, and being a man, you know," pleaded Cecilia.

"Man! God bless my soul! whatever Anstiss was, he was at least a gentleman by birth and inclination. Look at his choice in a wife, and being mad, he's not responsible for his views and his rascally politics!"

"I think, Anthony, I do really, that Mr. Coates might make a nice, well-bred girl very happy. He is savage, in a way, I'll allow; but I think women rather like savages. Th—they're very amenable to treatment, and there is nothing a conscientious woman likes better than to tame a—a noble animal."

Anthony looked at her suspiciously. Cecilia struck him as getting rather glib with her views.

"Women! Women are beyond me!" he growled.

With proud humility, he bent his eyes upon his book. "I wish ma'am, I wish you could read the 'Immortals.'"

"I wish I could, Anthony. No doubt it would help one better to understand more about mortals."

"At least, my dear Cecilia, it might help you to a little diffidence in the expression of your opinion upon conglomerate themes."

"Still, even a quite perfunctory study of quite everyday mortals may be instructive in its way. Conducive, moreover," said the gentle Cecilia, "to a somewhat painful, if wholesome, humility. I was much struck just now with the curious want of right feeling and insight possible to a healthy and eminently well-bred young animal."

With that Cecilia went on to recount the late small episode in a manner hardly so dramatic as Betty's, indeed, but quite as incisive. Anthony listened, with pursed lips.

"There's high school education for you," he commented. "Didn't I tell old Harry what the result of that crowning folly of his would be. Old fool! never read a book since he left Eton! but, marry, to give in like that to the levelling spirit of the age! upsetting all one's arrangements, too! Thirty thousand, and superb health! I've watched that girl's tastes from her birth—might have solved the whole problem of the poor boy's future! And now, you may take your oath, he's off on the chivalry tap! Small blame to him!" he murmured. "It's true for Aurelius—"

"A man with a bad heart may get safely past the crucial test, woman."

"Life's Ass Bridge, so to speak," interposed Anthony, "to the benefit of himself and his prospects; but with a good one he's doomed."

"She's such a sensitive little thing," said Cecilia, after a pause, "and has a most consuming conscience."

"Conscience! Conscience in women generally spells cruelty. It is frequently a probe to touch up the wounds of others. She can't be always prodding at herself, and if a woman has a talent, you may take your oath she'll keep it going. No 'mute inglorious Milton' about your sex, ma'am!"

"That point struck me too, Anthony. You must take the little thing in hand yourself."

"I!" said the flattered and astonished Squire. "What the deuce do I know about girls?"

"My dear Anthony!" She smiled round slowly at his rows and rows of russet-brown authorities.

"And the observation of a long and reflective life, dear," she added, indulgently; "and so I brought her back with me!"

"What, that minx! And Jock! my dear Cecilia!"

"But, Anthony, it's Mr. Coates."

Anthony stared, helpless, at his books. It was no moment for coherent reflection, still less for any application of the fruits of research.

"Come, Anthony! come, dear, and see the little lonely thing! If you had only seen her face when I went up to ask her to come to us!"

"If you weren't literally riddled with sentiment," Cecilia," said the Squire, severely, rising, however, to his feet, "you might have been a woman of sense!"

CHAPTER XIII.

AS now often happened, Jock had to spend all the bright hours of the next morning shut in with mortgage deeds and a melancholy lawyer.

Mrs. Hallowes' heart bled as she watched his retreating back, but her reason rejoiced.

She rescued Joyce, who, under the inexorable guardianship of Anthony, was being bombarded with quotations, somewhat freely edited, and having wrapped her up in furs, sent her forth into the sunshine.

James, who had noted, with grave amusement, the mute but inexorable purpose in Cecilia's eyes, took his hat serenely and, amiably enough, fell in with her blatant plan.

They were out now in the frozen grounds, he and Joyce, silent, under the great blue sky.

The air was so crisp and keen and eager, so ringing with life, that words seemed to be slow, dragging, fatiguing things. Swift sparks of irresponsible thought better matched the scene.

The sun threw jewels on all the frosted leaves, and twisted rainbow lights around every icicle that hung from every roof-tree. The berries were rubies all set in diamonds! The birds, forgetting their dry winter throats, broke forth into little bursts of song which snapped off, defeated, into a poor croak, only to trill out the next instant upon an easier note! They knew what they were about, these birds, and would not be silenced! It was a victorious day, which threw a challenge to every merry heart to sing for joy.

And yet in this alert, shining, chilly world, was there a glint of cynical mockery, which made Coates gird at last against the silence and consider the advisability of making a bid for the soothing melody of the purest voice to which he had yet listened. Mr. James Coates was,

that morning, in an experimental mood, and would spare neither himself nor any one else.

A petulant confusion of a girl faltering into life had a powerful fascination for one of James' temper.

Her shy, shrinking fear in the face of happiness, amused while it hurt him sharply. Her foolish hands, which ached to grasp the sun, moon, and stars and all the impossibles for creatures who could have no use for them, while her own rights and delights were slipping slack through her fingers, touched him.

But her grave, grey eyes, turned obediently to his at the first tone of his voice, annoyed him keenly.

Not a trace in those eyes of the odd, vague, mutinous protest, anxious, expectant, which invariably darkened them when directed upon Jock.

The eyes that looked at him were the absorbed, reverent eyes of a studious child who stood before her first Prophet. And quite unconsciously—that was clear to be seen, although indeed it took nothing from the unpleasantness of the fact—directly she began to look at him, Joyce crossed her little hands in an attitude not unlike one of devotion, upon her waistband.

James was beginning to feel rather brutal. He was brilliantly alive that sparkling morning, as much alive as ever Jock could be. Why, in the name of common-sense, could not the simpler parts of the girl struggle up to him, even in a spirit of reproof, through those dappled rims, as they invariably did to Jock? Truly being God and Prophet takes the keen edge off life, for a man.

"Well, Miss Anstiss," said James, in a hard, practical tone, "when are you going to begin to breathe freely?"

Absorbed in the movements of two glittering beauties of bullfinches, Joyce did not hear him, and she looked more than ever a star half hid in a cloud.

Presently, in some vague way, it was borne in upon her that the silence had received a jar, and so she lifted her lustrous eyes with a respectful enquiry in each of them. James repeated his bald remark.

"Oh!" she murmured, "what do you mean?"

"So far, you know, you've never in all your life drawn

a full breath." He appeared to know a good deal about her. It was a little terrible. At the same time, being the centre of a conversation was still so new that it thrilled her—not unpleasantly. Beheld from above downward, her profile was enchanting. James felt more amiable.

"You're sure to have been a little mouse of a child," he went on, "who read and always did her best. So, naturally, you had no call for desperate climbs or grasping, greedy breaths. You walked softly in dreams. And then, all at once, you were cast into the fiery furnace of the people, and were next door to choked. Until you learn to take the people quietly, nothing chokes quicker. And an unalloyed course of them is apt, permanently, to undermine the power of free-breathing; that is, of course, if you're made that way."

"But,—oh! This from you!"

"I'm not a philanthropist, don't you see? I'm one of them. Come, now, did you ever walk through a dim grey street, with the air shutting down on you like a coffin-lid? Did you ever go into a dull, narrow room with a dirty white key pattern running round it pitilessly, and a sea of white, patient faces staring at a table of buns and tea, or else at the wooden countenance of the gentleman next about to address the meeting, without a bursting heart and little short breaths, that hurt you? Now, by the 'blue sky above us,' did you?"

"How—how do you know?"

"Why! You must, being you! You do your philanthropy in little breathless runs. Then stop, panting, to wonder why on earth the seething, labouring, suffering mass isn't on your heels!" He looked slowly and absently from her hat to her little feet. "To think that so slight a cause could hope to move so mighty a force!" The next second he burst into a laugh.

"Now, I say! That's outrageously rude. Jock couldn't have said that to save his life. Are you going to forgive me?"

"There's nothing to forgive," said Joyce, sadly. "I know what you mean."

"Let us come down that shining path and be sensible

like the birds. Listen to them! What a day it is! We might put it to better uses!"

"I wish you'd go on with the truth," she said, gravely.

"There are a thousand truths. Some of them are gentle."

"Perhaps the gentler ones will come some day when all the harsh ones are said."

"You permit yourself no relaxation. When you're not doing things for the people, you're thinking them out." And now, here in this clean, clear, northern air, you might have a chance of finding out what some of the gentler truths are, and learning what regular breathing means! But you must still go on with the grind, and when you're not at that you're in a succession of panics and gasps, because of the goings on and omissions of those who live in rich men's houses."

"Oh! 'It isn't that! Oh! you know it—"

"But aren't you panting now to utilise the superb material at present amusing itself—really quite decently and inoffensively—and to spread it abroad and parcel it out piecemeal over the land for the purpose of getting a lot of extremely injurious work out of it?"

"But are they to do nothing—nothing?"

"Oh, let them do as much as they like except meddle with things they don't understand; with the work of practical workers, in fact! So long as people have hard and fixed notions of what ought to be, and know nothing of what is, or how it came to be, the less they mess about professionally with the poor the better! Except, of course, in the old splendid patriarchal way."

"Splendid!"

"But why not? Must the tears of good women be organised before there's any virtue to be found in them? Or their life-blood tested, or the work of their hands sorted out by experts? Their mistakes, anyway, have kept their own hearts soft and the hearts of their children, and have never brought despair to any human soul. If they choose to follow instinct, while we prefer knowledge, why should we quarrel? If we must be superior, it's really much more agreeable to both parties to be

amused. And after all they were at work." James looked at her and laughed. "Oh, well! irresponsible work then, if you like, but it called for just the same amount of kindness and self-sacrifice as responsible work does; anyway, they were at work before we woke up. They were helping to strengthen the foundations of the earth with sincerity, while we were still peering into and probing its rotten places."

"At the same time the people is a serious business and calls for sound business ability. You may be as sincere as John the Baptist, and yet be wanting in that."

"Do they care? Do the half of them care?" she cried, doubting.

"What, because they can laugh when we can't? I should say they do care, and in a most sound and practical way, too. Plead any cause you will, and you'll never find their purse-strings tightened, and I hope you don't mean to infer that they haven't emotions enough. I'm not specially sentimental myself, yet I'd engage to draw tears from the eyes, say, of Miss Betty herself, and make the flesh creep on her bones, too, within an hour on behalf of those people of yours, if there was any object in doing it."

"You don't try to do these—these things to me!"

He looked at her and laughed softly.

"You've cried too much already," he said. "And your flesh is always creeping."

James was finding his experiment growing rather strenuous for so all-conquering an atmosphere. Gay inconsequence and rejoicing were abroad in earth and air, but the little wistful, troubled flower of a face turned up to him brought out all his native gravity. This annoyed him. At the same time she was his ideal of womanhood, his dream.

Sensitive, scrupulous, unselfish in the wrong way certainly, but then it was a way that touched a man. High-minded, most easily hurt, and yet with a fine courage.

It seemed to James as though a generation or so must have been too busy in turning out, veneering, glazing

and varnishing the smart girl, to have found leisure for fine, slow, delicate work, and so this small piece of rare, pure material had been passed over.

This pleased James; it made her more akin to his favourite study—the gentle, delicate ladies, who watched from their heavy gilded frames the engaging indiscretions of their posterity. They would be hard set to climb a fence, these women, and for conscience sake, might scream a little; but one could bar a door with her fine arm till it broke, and another sit and discuss the news of the day under the cool gaze of an implacable foe, with a husband or a friend hid behind the arras, or even in the safer seclusion of her own hooped skirt.

In revolt against all sentiment, and yet the very slave of it, James looked again at Joyce, and his eyes softened oddly. She gave a man a sense of security, this girl. She was so pure and proud and unbending. A dream from which there could be no rude awakening.

James had already had his first dream, one so great and lofty and impersonal that it had saved him once when he had been like to drown, and lifted him to some wonderful heights. But just when he had flown into air too rare and purified for common man, he had awaked to a reality so full of anguish, of unuttered and unutterable woe, that even now to think of it made his heart turn cold. In this dream there had been also a woman, and all the pain and all the woe had been for her. It was an exquisite, an awful, and an educating dream, and considering that he was Man, a most amazingly unselfish one.

But into this new dream Self would come clamouring. He could not generalise. It was what *he* wanted, what *he* desired, what *he* would have—that is, if he could make up his mind to have anything.

On the whole he was quite satisfied to be self-sufficing.

But in case this stout and excellent prop of self-sufficiency should fail him, here was everything the like of him could want, so close that he could feel each breath she drew. Here worshipping, yet in doubt, a creature made to be happy out in the full sunshine, wistful and

an inspiration when the twilight fell ; a stay through all the reaches of the long black night.

She had everything but the power of laughter, and to crown her with that would be his part ! A man likes to have something left for his own moulding.

To look on at gayety. To know that hidden down somewhere in half the world there was still springing eternal the capacity for careless joy ; to listen to sincere laughter and watch the play of little children ; it was these things alone that made life lovely for James and spurred him to live as honestly as he knew how.

That he had failed to find these radiant and delicate capacities embedded in his own flesh, in no sort of way surprised or offended him. That was nothing to go by. He had no rights in them.

He was, after all, the heir of unsatisfied indifference, and it now takes more than one generation, in a temperate zone, to teach a race to laugh.

He came of kith and kin that had always been steady, grim and pious folk, keeping their feet well away from the public house, and shunning the places where men "profanely talk." They had kept themselves to themselves, and never in any moment of their decorous lives had one man Jack of them ever for an instant experienced any impulse of sheer joy, licensed or unlicensed, or yet laughed thunderous out of a full heart. Such an event would have indeed been as appalling to the constitution of the Coateses as an angel's visit, and worse from an economic point of view. Probably have resulted in a spoilt dinner ; possibly a broken plate.

Untoward sensations in an uneventful family frequently beget chaos.

The lighter emotions were, in any case, held well in check by natural griefs and the anxiety attendant upon honest bread-getting, which is a serious matter, ungenial to levity.

Brooding behind the plough, the dead and gone Coateses had, for generations, been too tired even to wonder.

Without prejudice and without emotion had they

watched birth, life, death and resurrection, the four great events written clear upon each blade of grass, intimately and at first hand. Without one leap of the spirit, one throb of the heart, they had witnessed these miracles and passed them by. They had seen the glory and the loveliness of the earth with all the dew upon it.

They had been in the fields in the midst of all the murmurs when spring arose from her long sleep and went forth to reconquer the earth.

With sickle and scythe they had followed when summer—the finisher, the completer—swung proudly towards the west.

They stood amongst the stooks when autumn went down magnificently to meet Death, the Nursing-Mother of Life.

Moreover, they had learned things, these toilers. They could tell you to a day when each bird would change his note and the sunseekers fly south.

And yet they could neither wonder nor look up. Anxiety kept their dull eyes always upon the ground.

When one bitter day distress drove the clan from the fields to the town, the dim horror of the slums hounded into their poor souls the memory of all the lost brightness, which when they had it they had not regarded.

It was this that made the Coateses a sadder people than their neighbours, those to the manner born. It made them discontented also, and urged them to reach out. The freedom of the open was still in their blood. Finally it evolved old James Coates.

It takes, however, more than one bound forward to wipe from off those whom generations of grinding necessity have made sordid their carking, relentless sense of anxiety.

The home life of James Coates had been always dimmed with the reflected pain of his forefathers.

His own mother, in her respectable trend upwards, directly she had shed one anxiety—as conscientiously as with each rise in prosperity she had bought a new prayer-book, and renewed the furniture—just as systematically did she assume a new worry.

His father's one notion of a *Te Deum* was each Sunday evening, after prayers, to go over consecutively each effort that had landed him at last upon an Axminster carpet; beginning always with that first volcanic revelation of spirit which has shown himself to his own sight for the first time a man fit to stand alone, and with a soaring heart swear in the teeth of his tyrant masters.

That was old Jim Coates' first tangible traffic with joy, and it served him for sixty years, and the upbuilding of a fortune of a million or so.

When James paused to think of himself, which he rarely did, he felt that he was a mongrel and difficult to account for: the sufferings and dumb repression of the one class at his back, the power to feel and be hurt of the other, conceived, Heaven alone knows how, working fiercely in all his members, stretching, exploring, searching possessive fingers into his very fibre, breaking down obstructions, tearing fresh channels.

He was natural, uncultured man in a thousand things, and patrician exclusionist in a few. And in regard to his conception of women, he was as full of prejudices as Jock.

She might be the sun, the moon, and the stars, but she must also know her place. The lamp to lighten the world; the fragrance to sweeten it. The inspirer, the prompter, the judge and the final appeal.

But the work necessary to be done in the world must be done by men.

James had been early disillusioned of rough work for delicate women. It had entered too largely into his first dream.

He turned suddenly to look at the second, and the anxiety of his tribe came battering down upon him like sleet.

His life had been so hard, so serious, so full of grinding work for his own people.

What right had he to saddle himself with an absorbing incubus whom he could not make happy? From sheer force of circumstance his life must be more or less plunged in pain. He could protect her from everything

else, but not from that, and it was the one thing he most dreaded for her. It would interfere, moreover, so abnormally with his own project. To get what you want—and James wanted a great deal—with an exaggerated quantity of quite unproductive pain in a woman's eyes haunting you day and night, seemed for the moment a hopeless outlook.

At present, indeed, the troubled eyes of the ominous possibility were strained eagerly past him to the people.

But he felt a pleasing confidence that it would need no very impossible sleight of hand upon his part to fix these pellucid orbs permanently upon himself, and then—then what a hindrance! But what a helper! what a handmaid for the gods!

James felt giddy.

He faced round to look again. She was leaning on the low gate that led from the yew walk into the park. The attitude suited her; the bending curves of her slender figure were curiously womanly. They appealed to the whole of James.

Her hair was a lively mass of red-gold. The chill, clear light brought out the firmness of her silken skin, giving it an almost incredibly pure luminosity.

The little want of curve about the mouth, the composed high-bred rigidity of the chiseling, satisfied him fully. There was no slackness about it, no unrestraint, no grovelling earthliness. Everything about that mouth made heavenwards.

The absence of humour even, noticeable in every feature, did not displease James.

A sense of humour is rarely the first thing a man cares to track-in an ideal. During the entire mystery of this quest he is generally rather humble, and humour throws a remorseless light.

Besides, if Joyce had no humour, she had several dimples.

Suddenly James' eyes darkened, and an odd, amused, pitiful glance flashed from his eyes to the curve of her cheek.

"If she had humour now, she'd suffer too much," he

thought. "She's not ready for it, she must first get some sense."

"Mr. Coates," said Joyce, abruptly, lifting herself lightly from the gate. "Mr. Coates, perhaps what you say about leisure people is true. You must know. But why do you try to take my courage away? I—I haven't so much. Why do you try to push me back out of my place? I'm sure as it is I don't feel so very secure in it."

"What is your place?" he said, gently.

She flushed miserably.

"To—to work for the poor—the people—but—but not in the—splendid patriarchal way."

He looked away from her. Her voice was quite enough for a man without adding her face to it.

"The poor, or the people, don't want that sort of work done for them by—over-pitiful children. They must do it themselves under the spur of strong, remorseless men. The patriarchal system is quite sufficient to provide palliatives. You belong to the Tribe of the Patriarchs. Couldn't you stick to their methods? They're very kind, and really fairly intelligent."

"I? Oh!"

Her voice was almost a sob.

James felt himself being led on recklessly.

"But there are so many things for you," he said, "for you and the like of you. Without you nothing would be done right. Without you the men who direct the work would never be fit for this stupendous and most thankless task. It's a crushing, unpleasant business," he added, hastily, "and it's better for women—women like you—to approach it—through a middleman, you know."

The poor little thing's face was making James feel awful. He spoke in a slow, high-principle sort of way that aroused all her evil passions.

When startled out of herself, there was abundant natural woman in Joyce.

"You think I'm a fool!"

"Do fools make men? I was under the impression they unmade them."

"You think I'm unfit for anything else, but the usual

things—arranging cut flowers, drawing-room repartee, husbands, feeding peacocks, and finding fault with other people's clothes, and your own servants—discussing the sermon. O—Oh!”

“These are all excellent things in their way and require, no doubt, some understanding. But I think you would do even more than that——” he broke off short, flushing darkly.

“You think I might even collect money for Zenana missions or cats' homes. You think I'm purely feminine and best fitted to the trivial task?”

“What's amiss with being purely feminine? It used to mean in the old days, being pure and good. I like that interpretation best. And you call helping to make a man a trivial task, do you? Good Lord, wait till you try it. It's because we know only too well what a deuce of a matter it is to make anything out of ourselves that we try to fob the job off on women!” said James, in his overbearing way.

Joyce lifted her head haughtily. “What!”

“Is it so bad after all—such a bad place in the world?” said he, his voice abruptly softening. “To be the point of Life, of Light, in an inert mass? The leaven to leaven the lump? The centre of growth? The little cogwheel that moves the whole great lumbering machine, faithful and exquisite in fashion and detail? The one thing that must not go wrong, that has all the responsibility, that holds in check the whole machine, which without it is an ungainly, purposeless encumbrance, very possibly even a monster?”

Joyce lifted her proud head higher. Her pink cheek was no pinker than before, but in her eyes were two glints of resentment.

“I know nothing of these things myself. But I have heard them discussed—lately. Not at all, however, in the way you do. In a different—Oh! in quite a different way!” Now the pink was turned to rose, and she glanced aslant at him. “Is—is this the way—men think of it?”

“I believe——” said James, meekly. “I think that

this is the way in which the men who hope to do big things—the larger machines—you know, think of it.”

“They’re big and clumsy,” he said, gently, with shy apology. “They feel afraid of themselves. They know, you see, that it is not in themselves they’ll find anything fine or delicate, or lovely enough—of which to make—to make—a cogwheel, you know.”

“Oh!” said Joyce.

“And amidst the millions of serfs and clowns there are a few kings,” said James, in a lower voice; and in justice to him, be it said, that in this connection no thought of himself as monarch so much as crossed his mind, for James had a grim sense of humour, somewhere. “It’s no such bad place, is it, to be the power behind the throne.” She bent her head and presently an odd, breathless look of wonder crept softly like a veil over all her face, and she seemed to have forgotten to be haughty.

The pause before action that riddles courage, but occasionally saves a cause, of a sudden gripped James. He laid his large, well-shaped, practical hand so heavily upon the gate that it creaked sharply, and moved a step away from her.

He laughed noiselessly at the hideous pain it cost him to step from the consecrated ground.

For one minute a fierce desire took him to crush out of her, for good and all, her amazing folly, her wistful reaching out after the truth—her craven dread of it.

The next he could have dipped his brush in the sunlight to paint pictures for her sweet eyes.

Fool she might be, but she was woman also. Woman with the unopened casket of life in her hand, longing to peep and yet afraid.

A butterfly with beauty so exquisite that it had taken the strivings of countless generations to bring it to perfection, holy and aloft, poised upon folded wings, and on the point of fluttering down to the candle—himself!

The thought was grotesque.

He looked at his great limbs; at the size and immense inexorable power of his hands.

One touch might disturb her serenity; might also strike off some of her bloom!

And yet to strip the cloud from such a star and watch it shine out triumphant and tender!

Lit by such radiance a man could move worlds.

His breath came hot and quick. His hand involuntarily touched and caught a little bit of her brown skirt.

Then all of a sudden Joyce seemed to stand in an enchanted circle and James' heart got cold in his breast, and fell like lead.

"Oh, God!" he thought once again, "what a helper! What clay to mould! But if I take it in hand, she'll look anxious the rest of her days, and these women were never made to look anxious. And I—I have the deuce and all to do."

He loosened his clutch on the brown wisp of tweed, and with its soft warmth still upon his fingers, he kissed them stealthily behind Joyce's quivering back.

"Miss Anstiss," said James, "don't you think it's rather a subtle morning? May I smoke?"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE undercurrent of sentiment which was constantly surprising no one more than himself might upon occasion drive James to generous deeds. Upon an impulse of exploded chivalry he might thrust a happy chance aside, but he had no mind to thrust the radiant cause into the very arms of another better equipped and less scrupulous, though no more human, than himself. It struck him as rather hard lines, therefore, that just at the moment of, at any rate, a well-meaning surrender of the first man's just rights, the second should appear turning the corner hard by the rose arbour, whistling, and dog at heel.

It was in many regards an inauspicious moment. New lights, set afire by himself, were breaking up through the girl's eyes, quickening all her face. He turned his eyes from Jock swaggering down the hill to Joyce, her unembarrassed glance upon himself. Suddenly she gave a sense as of the unfolding of rare, soft leaves, whose whiteness presently, thought James, with his usual half sneer at himself, when the other man comes along, will be flooded with rose.

Still, after all, he had got what he wanted. His series of late experiments had been conducted steadily towards this precise goal. The fact that they had stopped so short of it, had been entirely of his own choosing. He had given the initial master-touch to the innermost spring of the girl's unconscious life, and that it was entirely for the benefit of Jock Hallowses, was his own fault.

Involuntarily, James lifted his massive shoulders and shook with the odd, silent laughter which a grim joke at the expense of one-half of him invariably let loose.

This was playing jackal to the lion with a vengeance!

Jock was of those men who carry their strength lightly, and with an air so careless, debonair, and royal, that

for the sheer pleasure of trying experiments with an unfamiliar, stored energy, James often, before this, had amused himself by playing jackal to this young lion; in the full confidence, of course, that had he chosen, he could have made a very creditable lion himself; possibly, if put to it, even have roared down Jock.

But this was another story altogether.

As he now watched Jock swinging up to them, to his half-resentful, half-amused eyes, the boy looked more Greek than English. He was so whole and wholesome; so brilliant with half-unconscious, intellectual life; so buoyed up by wholly unconscious insolence, he scarce seemed the product of murk and mist.

"He might have the grace to show something of his generations of beef-fed ancestors in his cheeks," thought James, ruefully. "One would feel in that case less moved to throttle him. It's those insidious framed women, I suppose, good Lord! and—Anthony."

Jock being anxious for information, when he fetched up before the two, naturally looked first at the man, who although neither merry nor amiable, was yet steadily making a polite remark. There was indeed generally apparent in his demeanour an easy absence of sentiment. Jock was wholly satisfied, and forthwith some odd change in little Joyce engaged all his attention. Her eyes, he noticed, still reflected upon him as upon some strange beast, but now neither in sorrow nor in anger, merely in a spirit of intelligent enquiry.

"I have to go down to the village before luncheon; will you come, you two?" said Jock. They turned, by tacit consent, and struck out across the frozen turf.

To see the son of the most slovenly landlord in the county—a byword for all antique vices—amongst his own people, must be a little painful, certainly, but even more interesting.

Joyce looked across Jock at James in order to ascertain how he took the matter. Her inspection was scarce satisfactory. James was talking to Jock of polled cattle of choice, obviously not of courtesy. He had clearly clean forgotten her. Joyce started, and all her own

words ran away from her shyly, which only shows that Miss Anstiss had begun at last to open her eyes to her privileges, and was learning the meaning of demand.

Her silence, however, was so eloquent that it made two good round miles no more than a step to the two men; for, taken seriously, as a parlous enigma, or with a light heart, as one takes the sunshine, or flowers, or melody, or hope, or any other of the delectable things which make us cling hard to life, nothing shortens the road for a man more than the close neighbourhood of a lovely face, and if its wearer is still hovering upon the brink of her destiny—still, so to speak, in the palm of his hand—why, so much the better. And so the men talked joyously on of polled cattle, and walked the girl off her legs.

It was characteristic of the two that, although Jock was the last to come, quite unconsciously he took the first place. No man ever altogether grudged Jock's right to the best place, he stepped so naturally into it, and was so ready to step aside if one better than himself, or weaker, claimed the floor.

In pausing, however, to go single file over a bridge, it was James, from behind Jock's back, who first perceived the throbbing breathlessness of Miss Joyce. Jock was thinking how well quick walking made her look, and wondering why every girl didn't wear a little sable hat with an old paste buckle in the bow over her left temple. But there was always something motherly in the way James looked after women! In his reverent, resolved hands, they might have been babies or religious relics. A woman of sense saw at once that it were wiser for her to take James' view of her need, her weaknesses, and the enveloping circumstances. He was invariably polite to protest, but there his forbearance ceased.

The natural end of weakness was to be protected. In the case of a fool, one's road was clear. A man had merely to keep his temper, and to do what had to be done silently. The necessity to intervene in the present case was, however, removed from him by the sight of Mrs. Hallows' pony carriage blocking the road and call-

ing a convenient halt. Cecilia was talking to a tall woman on the off-side, while Anthony on the near was apparently rebuking a parson.

"The new curate," said Jock. "Come from your parts. Just married. Hardly out of his honeymoon, so I hear."

"Poor chap! your father seems to be rather hard on him about that unhappy vestryman who trapped the fox. Hope his bride is an alleviation."

"She's a riddle, anyway, and jolly good-looking. I can't make her out."

"Perhaps he can."

"Oh! no, he can't. But he's a spiritual sort of person, I fancy, who'd accept things in a nice, straightforward sort of way. As soon think of throwing a searchlight on his wife, you know, as on the foundations of Christianity."

"The riddle's a woman of sense, then?"

Mrs. Hallowes' soft voice explaining some parish matter to the curate's wife was now the only one to be heard. James was close up beside the carriage before his near-sighted eyes could discern anything more definite than the shadowy outlines of a slender, willowy back; then he started violently, and the lady's face, as she turned it to him, whitened, but she put out her hand readily and smiled.

James didn't see her hand. He was looking across it at her husband.

"You don't mean to say it's Herbert Thorpe?" said he, under his breath in an incredulous voice.

"Yes, it's Herbert Thorpe! Herbert, don't you see Mr. Coates? We've both known Mr. Coates," she explained to Mrs. Hallowes, with serene, smiling, assured dignity, "oh! for years. How many years, James?" said she, in a swift half aside, her eyes flashing on him oddly. She turned her cameo-like face back to Cecilia. "And yet he doesn't know even that we're married!" she said, laughing. "We thought we'd wait till we were settled and then ask him to come and judge how it answers; but we hardly expected to meet him here!"

When her husband came up, with outstretched hand, to James, she moved close up to Mrs. Hallowes.

"I wonder," she thought, "I wonder if he's ever noticed that he never touched my hand? And I should like to know who the Puritan maid is."

Upon this point Mrs. Hallowes was eager to inform her.

"Joyce! come here," she said. "I want you girls to know each other. You have both learnt a good deal of the sadness of life in big smoke-ridden towns. My little friend Miss Anstiss has worked much harder than one could suppose, to look at her. Mrs. Thorpe won't admit to having done anything," said Cecilia, with her kind smile, "but her husband has been more generous in his confidence."

"My husband has only been married to me for a month," said Mrs. Thorpe, with her baffling smile.

"But he has watched you for many months, through many grievous scenes. I am glad," said Mrs. Hallowes, on a quick troubled impulse. Something in the bride's face suddenly hurt her, and Cecilia's odd interest and insight into youth was continually bringing pain to her. "I am glad you married before you had time to grow the least tiny bit weary of good deeds. Now it will be beginning all over again. There will be a new sort of freshness in everything, and a new sort of virtue will be going out in all your touches. "I am glad you have come amongst us, Mrs. Thorpe. The rector's wife and I are so old. Our people need the touch of kindly young hands."

"Ha!" thought Mrs. Thorpe, who cold though she was as stone, and much shocked, could yet take keen notice of things. "So she doesn't want a step-daughter eager for good works!"

She glanced at Joyce, who had gone round to the Squire, in whom she was finding a growingly absorbing interest. The amazing inaccuracy and disorder in his classical quotations were making much more intelligible to her the cast of mind which could be content with unspeakable ventilation and no drains. So long as the Squire got to the ultimate sense he hankered after, anything in the way of words would serve his purpose.

A soul thus incapable of appreciating the finer man as in the divine study of sociology!

After all, in spite of drains, his people lived and moved and produced an innumerable progeny! What more could such a man even desire!

Joyce was growing extremely tolerant towards the old man. His profile was the image of Jock's.

Anthony upon his part, after looking at her for any time, invariably forgot the classics and began to think of flowers, whereupon he fell to happily on his garden.

This periodical plunge from pain into peace was becoming quite an engaging study for Joyce's expanding mind.

Mrs. Thorpe was longing to be alone and silent, but something in Mrs. Hallowes' voice and look touched her genuinely, and she was a woman to whom, in her calm moments, gracious words came naturally.

"I shall take that as a sort of marriage blessing," she said, laughing softly. "It's really the first I have had. We were married all alone in a great cold church. Neither of us have any belongings, and as my husband wanted to get Southern sunshine before he began work here—he had been very ill—there was no time to gather up friends."

Mrs. Hallowes' fat ponies were crawling along sleepily. James Coates was talking to her husband and looking at the Puritan girl. Elinor Thorpe felt herself falling back into numbness.

"I knew he had been ill," said Cecilia. "The rector told me; told me also the cause—the terrible strain of overwork; and such work! You must be proud of your husband, Mrs. Thorpe!"

"I'm very proud of him! He'll soon get well here."

"But not too soon! We don't often get such a man in our sleepy village. We don't want to lose either of you in a hurry. The arrival of a new curate, specially if he's married, is, I assure you, a very anxious season for us!"

"Some day," said Elinor, with a gleam of mischief in her eyes "your son——"

Mrs. Hallowes broke in with great alacrity.

"Oh! when Jock's wife comes, she will be very young and untried. You see, you have had peculiar advantages. We cannot expect so much from all young people."

Mrs. Thorpe found herself taking a languid interest in this singular attitude upon the part of a step-mother. It helped to pull her out of her dreadful numbness.

"Mr. Hallowes is also young and untried, but he knows how to deal with his people. He'll teach his wife." Involuntarily, her eyes flashed towards James Coates. "A man in his pleasant ignorance teaches these things better than a woman. A woman knows too much of the toughness of her sex to instruct any one, afflicted in the same way, in tenderness. But I hope Mr. Hallowes' wife won't teach him his power for a long time, or he will be leaving this little world for the big one before he's done all that's wanted here."

Mrs. Hallowes flicked her ponies and glanced at Jock proudly, but her lips were prim.

"I think Jock already knows something of his power. A man can reach that knowledge without the help of a wife," said she, sedately, "but he knows also how to do right. He will stay with us just so long as he is wanted."

Mrs. Thorpe looked at her slowly, with an odd smile. "I believe I understand her attitude towards that young man," she thought. "I doubt if he does himself. If the—young and untried—comes along in the shape of Priscilla—or the like of her"—her eyes had darted to James—"then he never will; consequently he'll miss something considerably better than Priscilla! I think I shall have to avoid little Mrs. Hallowes, else some day I shall be making a fool of myself before her! I wish she'd drive on."

Mrs. Thorpe rarely wished for anything within reach of her grasp but she got it. She looked across at her husband.

"Herbert," said she, in her fine, serene way, "will you persuade Mr. Coates to come to tea with us to-day? Then you can finish your reminiscences by the fire. At

the present moment, between you, you're freezing an entire family."

"You don't mean to tell me that it's Priscilla the Prude?" she said, when James came across to her.

"It's no one" said James, shortly.

"I don't say it is! I doubt if she's human. But she's your dream, and you're breathing life into her. Take care you don't do it for the benefit of some one else."

* * * * *

Something seemed to have put out Anthony a little.

"That Radical fellow" he observed, gloomily, "instead of jabbering to the curate, ought to be coming to the scratch. She's a tidy little girl; a deal too good for him. And as to that curate, he looks too much of a babe and suckling for my taste. A man can be a very decent chap without exuding holiness. You couldn't drink a glass of hot toddy under that fellow's double-distilled eye without feeling a lost soul. To my mind it's sheer insolence of office in a parson to lower the self-respect of another made in like image to himself, by airs. Some of 'em would like you to be crying stinking fish day and night. I have my doubts of Thorne's soundness. The rector says he's all on the itch for novelty. And he's apparently been brought up on humble puppy; trumped every wrong card on Thursday night. No addition to the place at all."

In moments of just annoyance the Squire showed occasionally some carelessness in the grouping of his facts.

"Still he seems a moderate churchman," said Cecilia, mildly, "and reasonable at the meetings."

"He took care not to show the cloven hoof about Atkins' blackguardly candles, and took that trapped fox in the right spirit, if that's what you mean. But they have a way of keeping meek, these chaps, till the occasion arrives."

The Squire glanced back at James, and perceived Jock between him and the minx. "There's a queer family likeness between Jesuits and Radicals," he mused aloud.

"One's as unsettling as the other. You feel 'em in the air. Only with a Jesuit," he pursued, with another glance backward, "you feel sure about his manners, and he has the saving grace of celibacy. You know exactly how far you can utilise him. I wonder where that wife of his picked the curate up? I'll bet my boots she never started in life with a curate for a goal. Wonder what drove her to it?"

"I hope it was love, Anthony."

"Love! did you look at her eyes, ma'am! and her figure! A curate with his head in the clouds!"

He sighed hopelessly. It always troubled Anthony to see a fine woman in the clutch of any vile circumstance.

"You might have prepared us, Jim," said Jock. "You know 'em both, it seems."

"Well, considering you hadn't even mentioned their names! Miss Anstiss, what do you think of Mrs. Thorpe?"

Joyce, with a new intelligence in her face, looked impartially from one to the other of her escorts.

"I think—she's—several women, and they're all beautiful—in—in a way. But," she added, with some haste, "don't you think that this is a very peaceful village for her to choose?" She looked pensively along a row of beetle-browed cottages standing delicately in little gardens. "And small. I shouldn't have thought it would quite hold her."

"Neither should I," said James, laughing. "She always struck me as needing space."

CHAPTER XV.

MR. THORPE sat beside his bright hearthstone, reading, annotating, and musing. The presence of his wife was no longer a tumultuous, imperious, delicious interruption, as it had been in those first halcyon, illuminating days after marriage. Now it had got into the air ; it was shed upon him like balm—the healing, wholesome balm of pines. It filled and completed him. Imperceptibly it quickened and deepened each current of his life. Sometimes he looked at her.

She was one of those women who give the impression of perfect leisure, yet never idle. She rarely sat still ; there were so many things that needed some vivifying touch. But her every movement brought with it a sense of peace ; it stilled and calmed. She could draw a man from his study to her drawing-room, whenever his best work had to be done, his best thoughts thought.

But there was one window in that long, low-ceilinged room, buttressed with stout oak beams, before which Elinor Thorpe could stand immovable and absorbed for hours. She never dared to pause there, unless she had time to watch her full.

It was a window facing south, which led through latticed doors down some crumbling mossed steps into a circular walled garden, fashioned thus upon the whim of some dead woman from the south.

She said that the English sun sometimes forgot the little shy flowers which crept into the corners and passed them by. And since the sun had long ceased to shine upon her own life, she was careful that it should shine as much as possible, in this dull land, upon her garden.

Mrs. Thorpe had never before lived in a garden. At first sight it awed and enthralled her, terrified and gave her new courage. And a silent, insistent contemplation

of it brought with it a new sanity. She felt a little towards it as a mother to whom life has dealt heavy blows might feel towards her firstborn child.

Mr. Thorpe, being hampered by a halting metaphor, turned his far-sighted spiritual eyes upon his wife bending in an incomparable attitude to alter the position of some cushions. The firelight showed up the curious charm of the widow's peak of her dark hair upon her broad white brow. Her sad eyes were hid under their heavy, white lids. The rest of her face gleamed, haunting, elusive, lovely, out of a tender mist of shadows.

Herbert went back to his sermon a more human man, and rounded the severity of his metaphor by a delicate flicker of beneficent wit.

She had, as usual, given the last touch. She was, as he always found her, the thread of silk in the fabric of wool! When he ran through his sermon he felt with the grateful heart of the eternal child-man that he was going forward. With a sigh of content, he put away his sheets, and prepared for a smoke and a little idling.

Directly she perceived his intention, Elinor dropped a little screen that she had been mending exquisitely, and came and knelt down beside the fire, taking delicate care, however, to be just one little inch out of the reach of his touch. She felt instinctively that, in the glamour of this hour, she always filched from his labourious life. In the stimulation of a sermon brought near to perfection, he would be too quietly joyous either to bridge over the infinitesimal distance or to resent it. He was too happy to be wistful. To watch the flame-light play upon her face would, in this mood, be all-sufficient for Herbert.

Oddly enough, Elinor found distinct advantages in being married to a poet.

"I wonder why James Coates is here?" said Herbert, when he had watched her a little.

As sometimes happens with the leaven of purity upon a gross earth, the little children and the grown men who still look out at things from a child's clear soul, Herbert's thoughts frequently marched with those of the beloved one, but with a somewhat free interpretation.

His wife's start when he spoke, to so spiritually-minded a man, was quite imperceptible.

"Do you wonder? I don't. You're poets—you and James."

This artless statement was received by Herbert with a broad smile. Elinor paused to laugh.

"You are, all the same, but with a difference! He came here to dream. It's a pleasant atmosphere for that sort of thing—and to eat forbidden fruit——"

"My own!"

"You're all descended from Adam, more especially James Coates. His place is set in the city, amidst chemicals and smoke and furnaces, amidst the turmoil and horror of life. He lives for his people, and in a dull, dogged, unpleasant sort of way, he'll probably die for them."

Elinor's narrow, well-cut nostrils rose and fell a little hurriedly, but her face was no more ivory-white than usual, nor were her hands less steady.

"It's quite natural that he should like to stray into other men's orchards, to look at their flowers and taste their fruit, sometimes on occasion to steal some of it, perhaps! Mrs. Hallowes is just the sort of woman he'd like to look at and stand about, in his ungainly way, to worship, and that big, lazy, good-tempered, young man, full of unawakened strength, who'll conquer from a sort of habit because he doesn't know what being beaten means, of course he'd attract James Coates, who'll conquer, too, but through sheer force of knowing all about every difficulty that blocks his road! Even the Squire is an agreeable incident in the life of the like of James. And the little Puritan maid—did you look at her? Did you take the smallest notice of her?"

"No," said Herbert, apologetically; "I was looking at your back."

"I thought so! Well, from the point of view of a powerful self-sufficient person, she's rather ideal, too. Men with restless, big brains, inexorable sort of duties to put through, who have to deal heavy-handed justice and use coarse weapons, and march forward treading down pro-

test, and prejudice, and sentiment, and tears perhaps, and numberless other pleasant fragrant things of no account—as one might crush bluebells sometimes in order to clear away rotten timber—oh! a man like that would naturally like to come upon a—a little porcelain philanthropist that he could preserve and cherish with a clear conscience. In this case he might, with advantage, do a little tilling, too. Adam, you'll remember, was a gardener with an experimental turn!"

"I remember. Go on!"

"She's the sort of girl to set a man wondering. He thinks it's at her, but it's at himself really—at her delectable effect upon him; at all the gentle, tender impulses her fragility, put against the stern, regenerative purpose in her eyes, sets going in him."

Contrary to his usual custom when hearkening to the instructions of his wife, Herbert looked incredulous.

"My dear child, your imagination expands daily. Looked at from the prosaic point of view, surely Coates would be much more inclined to marry a brilliant, experienced woman, full of life and wit, who would be more of a complement to himself than that little demure thing."

"Men ought to know something of each other," she sighed.

"They may, in the important things, debts and horses, and the other educating influences, but I never yet met a man who could make even a decent guess at the sort of girl his dearest friend would marry."

"A brilliant, experienced person—which is how you would describe a smart girl—will never give a man either the time or the chance to wonder at himself. All his attention is fixed inexorably upon her—upon her next steps, her next sentence, her newest paradox. He has no place at all in the connection. No glint of reflected glory illuminates *his* being, elevates *his* soul, expands *his* intelligence."

"The Eternal Feminine swamps everything. A man like James, you know, could never conceive, much less utter, the meteoric splinters of wise folly which that sort of girl can slew round without so much as a pause for

thought. She might leave him in a breathless maze, this glittering masterpiece of the labouring ages, but she'd never leave him in love! He wouldn't have the strength for it. His one desire would be, when he escapes from her, to smoke and drink and generally restore his self-esteem."

"Dear me," said Herbert, "I'm dreadfully ignorant, it seems, in these matters."

"A smart girl," she pursued, half laughing, to hide her eagerness. Talking about James to Herbert was somehow making his coming in presently feel less difficult. "A smart girl may whet her virgin sword upon James, or the like of him, but she'll have to realise herself eventually through the medium of a slighter man."

"If you hadn't humbled me to the dust, beloved, I should venture to suggest that young Hallows rather admires the small, nebulous star. I perceived an earnestness about the set of his shoulders, and some impatience, while the Squire was pouring the prevalence of shoddy goods upon the poor child's head."

"That's quite likely. She's penniless, and forbidden. That alone would whet his appetite. She has the novelty of being as anti-woman worker as she is anti-county. She has a little niche all to herself, which might convey an idea of originality to a bewildered man. She presents a marked contrast to the lady designed for him by Providence and finance. To crown all, she's bullied by that bouncing family, and blushes like an angel."

"You've seen her—how often?"

"Mrs. Rector furnishes me with copious details. But be soothed. With this young man, as with the other, she'll make entirely for righteousness. She's the handmaid of theory, that girl, and suggestive to man of all man's virtues, while somewhere attached to her there's a faint halo of martyrdom peculiarly feminine. And she's obliging beyond words; for, though she knows nothing either of man or the prick of temptation, she feels quite equal to assume the direction of any man's conscience. Herbert, don't you think that experience is rather disastrous to courage?"

She spoke to her husband, but her eyes pierced beyond

him into a great darkness. To his tender, holy mind there was in this radiant moment no darkness anywhere.

"You have a nice way of talking nonsense, Elinor!"

"And you have a nice way of listening to it, Herbert!"

He leaned nearer, almost within reach of her. She moved one inch farther and rested her head against a heavy arm-chair, and the flame leapt up and turned to warm-red bronze the tan splashes in her strange hair.

"I have wondered more than once," said Herbert, "that it did not occur to you to love James Coates."

"But it did," she said, slowly. "I have loved James Coates almost since I can remember."

He laughed aloud, a rare, pure, heartfelt laugh. "Ah! but that's different. It's quite different, thank God!"

"You're glad."

"God knows just how glad I am. You know, partly. I wonder if I know how glad you are."

"Now, there's man for you! Have you not just been defining in an indefinite sort of way, indeed, my limitations? I *am* glad. That's enough, isn't it? I'm glad to live, sometimes in a garden, and to rest always under the shadow of your wing."

Little red coals fell softly through the grate, and above the plane-trees beyond the garden wall the first star crept out. Herbert's dog and the cook's tabby, forgetting race, nestled together at Elinor's feet, and Herbert, his eyes still upon his wife, came back from a long musing.

"I'm thankful I have no reservations," he said, "no *arrière-pensée*. You're a compelling person. If I had, I should have to tell you."

She moved her head slightly to watch him quietly. "Why should you?" said she, "it might be the sort of truth that you ought not to tell me, that you ought not to tell any one, in honour to yourself."

"A wife——"

"Marriage doesn't cut any Gordian knot. A wife remains a woman, with her own soul to make or mar; and a husband remains a man in the same hobble. And the moralities are as they were in the beginning, and will be

unto the end, perfunctory things, with doubt peering always round some corner. We must still ravel out the tangle, each for himself, by the light born of some intimate, individual experience, into which marriage cannot enter."

"Marriage enters, insensibly, into everything. Its touches go deep and far."

"Oh! yes! They go deep and far. But even in marriage there must be a 'So far shalt thou go, but no farther.' Why? Isn't it exemplified in your life? Aren't there things concerning the human souls you serve which no power on earth would induce you to tell me, or me to hear? Then why should you maintain a decent silence in regard to other people's affairs, and proclaim within your own shut doors all that concerns yourself? You throw a veil of mercy over the wounds of others, and tear it off from your own, to display it to the one person in all the world whom it will torture. You would preserve the secret of another with your life, and blazen forth your own, with the righteous aim of ravishing and destroying two souls. Marriage isn't another word for the Inquisition. Why should one be staunch to friend and enemy alike, yet traitor to oneself? It's a code of honour I refuse to grasp. Honour is better than sacrifice, and more than truth."

"And the most truthful woman in the world can say what it pleases her to say on the subject!"

Elinor threw her arms back and laid her head on them.

"I might speak truths from this to midnight, that would grind like grit on my teeth, but they'd all melt like wax in that crucible of mercy you carry in your heart. You'd put them down to a woman's fluency—her gift of adjectives. You carry a divining rod in your hand for the good in people, not for the bad! You're a faithless shepherd. Fortunately for the parish, the mercy of the rector is discreetly tempered with justice, and he has a well-marked, detective instinct! Herbert, I hear James Coates. When he comes into a small house, he rubs his feet on the scraper in a motherly way. I—I dare-say he's thinking this very second of our new carpet."

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN James came in, she was kneeling beside the fire, smiling gravely. The light was so dim that she could not see his face. All she could see was his tall, dark figure pausing on the threshold. It was an old trick of his. For a long time now he had never come into any room where she was without pausing before he came forward to speak to her. And she knew just now how his face would look. It would look uncertain, enquiring. She was the one circumstance—this was her own way of putting it—that could move the countenance of James Coates from its habit of unassuming assuredness.

Elinor's whole face uttered one quick protest, then she laughed softly.

"It's all quite different from the rectory, James!" said she. "Come here into our ingle-nook. It's the one house in the village that has an ingle-nook, and we've got it!"

"Elinor! it's pleasant to see you here." The voice, for James, was really astonishing, and he seemed to be growing in grace of manner.

"Is it Priscilla or me—in a new light?" Elinor thought swiftly, and she laughed again, this time a little oddly.

"Thorpe! What have you been doing with her? You look just like the child I saw that night in the rectory. How long ago, Elinor?"

"Twelve years ago," she said, "there wasn't any ingle-nook in the rectory though, and the fire had gone out. You lit it, and we made a mustard poultice for my mother. You gave me a lecture on the chemical constituents of the thing. You had specialised in chemistry that term, and fairly throbbed with knowledge. But you spilt the mustard."

Suddenly she sprang up.

"Oh! Herbert, how could I have forgotten. Why it's your Winnstay evening! Ring twice, then they'll bring in tea at once. He has a cottage service there on Thursday, and we have tea early," she explained to James. "County gossip and the coming of you put it out of my head."

"I wish it wasn't so dark, James. I want you to see that we have a garden."

"I couldn't imagine you living in a garden," he said, quickly.

"I couldn't imagine myself, but it's nice to have a garden in my life, which is another thing altogether."

During the tea it was chiefly Elinor who talked, but everything she said was so right that each man was under the firm impression that in the matter of conversation he was doing rather especially well himself. The two were certainly liking one another better than ever they had yet done.

The saintliness of Thorpe appeared to be held better in hand, the man in him given more of a show, while Coates was distinctly less overbearing and headstrong than he used to be.

Directly her husband left the room, Elinor, who had been getting all the little things ready for him, thinking that James had gone with him to the hall door, drew a quick little breath and began to rest.

James, as it happened, had not moved from his dim corner. With one glance at her, his tone hardened, and the mark of interrogation reappeared upon his face. When he stood up square before the fire, Elinor knew that she would receive no quarter.

"Just look up for a minute," said he, in his old tone of command.

With her old prompting of obedience, she obeyed him.

"I thought all of you had grown young again," he said, "but your eyes are as old as ever. Do you mean to tell me, then, that this is all play-acting?"

"Certainly it isn't. If you happen to have lost the outlook of a child, and failed to acquire that of a saint, and aren't by nature a deeply religious skeptic—we can't

all be like Herbert and you!—a little play-acting will drift into most actions in life. If you have the dramatic instinct, that is, and are worth an audience.”

“Are you happy?” His face was set and disagreeable.

“Happy! I feel thankful, and secure, and blest. It’s like—like living in the Isle of Patmos with St. John.”

“Good Lord! He knows nothing about you. And if he did, he wouldn’t understand it. And you—you don’t love him—in the right way.”

“If you don’t happen to have married bits of a man picked up at random from the ashes of his dead self, but prefer a whole person equal to the charge of his own soul to embers that you must spend your time and breath blowing back into flame, the right way to love him is to make him happy.”

“What does he know of you? What does he understand?”

“He knows all that’s necessary for a man to know of his wife. He knows the best of me! And if I lived with him for fifty years, he’d know nothing else but the best. And if he doesn’t understand me, he thinks me perfect!”

“Elinor! It’s hideous!”

“Do you think that St. Paul told everything that happened to him before he joined the circle to St. John? and St. Paul—” With an irresistible gesture, she lifted her chair. In spite of himself, James smiled grimly. “St. Paul was a man of the highest intelligence.”

“We’re not dealing with apostles.”

“We’re dealing with one. Suppose, for convenience sake, you call me Judas?”

“I’ll call you nothing of the sort. Marriage—”

“Is a thing you can’t sum up in a word, or wipe out with a platitude. Shall we treat it negatively? To begin with, marriage isn’t a tribunal of final appeal for every occurrence before the act, nor is it a microscope in search of ante-marital bacteria.”

“A man—given he’s worth it—has a right to the truth in time, to face it or not, as he thinks fit.”

Elinor rose from the rug and sat down in a chair quietly.

"Truth is relative, after all," she said, "and a good deal of life, you'll admit, is a stirring up of mud to find clear water! Supposing one day into a peculiarly muddy reach of water, at the bottom of which lay all the time silver sand, there came a tempest and a great flood which swept all the mud away and laid bare the sand, must you, oh! James, must you still ignore the clear, staunch foundation, and be forever tracking the mud? Every man isn't Thomas. There are sinners, not to say saints, who would have died rather than thrust their fingers into those wounds, and," she said, in a low voice, "the thief had wounds, poor soul! as well as his Master. Every one seems always to be forgetting the poor thief's pain."

James stooped and looked at her.

There were little blobs of wet upon her forehead. He had seen this before in the case of a man under some intolerable stress, but he did not know that such things happen to women.

"Elinor! Elinor!" he said, in a low, hoarse voice, "you belong to me,—don't you know, in a way. Ever since that day we lit the fire and made the poultice we've belonged to each other. I've been a rough partner, dear, but we've hung together through a lot. I can't tell you what I wouldn't give to see you happy at last. But this isn't the right way."

"It isn't a man's right way, or some women's right way, but it's mine! Circumstances alter cases, and herself is the biggest circumstance any woman has to face. She must make the best of it, and do the best she can for it. Herbert isn't mere man. He's saint, priest, man, all in one—a complication, you'll admit! If—if I had told him, the saint in him would have yearned over me, and married me, probably. Saints are difficult to account for. The priest would have absolved me, but the man would ever after have been afraid for me! And one note of fear would shatter the perfect peace of Herbert's spirituality, the little child in all his belief,"

she said, in a low voice, "in every act of his life. And then where should I be? It's the little child in Herbert that keeps me going. It's that to which I hold on. If ever a full man is born from the saint, priest, man, and child, then I'll tell Herbert. But I think that will happen in some simpler elsewhere. It won't be here! Meanwhile what a bishop he'll make!"

"If you're anything, Elinor, you're modern, and sick to your finger-tips of the very name of heredity."

She lifted her head proudly, and her lips got a little whiter. "Better women than I have ghosts," she said, "and less generous men than you don't rattle them in her teeth."

"That's sophistry," said James. "A woman as sound at heart as you has no business to call up superfluous ghosts. There are enough of the inevitable sort."

"I daresay; but just then I had to think of an imminent, pursuing, present ghost. The ghost of the future was hid in a cloud."

"Did I make a mistake?" he asked, abruptly. "Ought I to have chucked the other things, and been more with you, those two years abroad? You know how it was that I couldn't, don't you?"

"I know, of course—"

"I meant you to have had a good time—such a good time that it would have blotted out every trace of morbidity."

"But that's precisely what it did do."

Her forehead was growing damp again. James wondered if women were often called upon to endure such pain, or men to watch it. He put his hands in his pockets and stood squarer.

"But you married Thorpe?"

"That wasn't morbidity."

"Looks deuced like it."

She laughed, tremulously. "James! Haven't you any sense of humour?"

"Elinor, if I had come, would it have made any difference? You daren't get morbid with me about."

"Do you mean, should I have married Herbert?"

Well, yes, I should. James, I'll tell you all about it, once for all, and then, if you want to, you can judge. Curious you never even thought of judging me until another man came into the business, and now every atom of judge in you is bristling up. Your not judging me in the first instant," she said, in her quiet voice, "was just what made me judge myself as fair as I knew how, as fair as I should have judged another woman in the same case. And it made me decide, too, to play the game in future as fair as I could, as fair as I would play it for another woman. You! Oh! you're fumbling for the black cap, James!" She sat straight up.

"That night you found me drunk, James, do you know, although you were my one friend all those years, in the end you knew more of the effect than you ever did of the cause, if it all—"

"Elinor!"

"One can't tell a man things just when they're happening. After that blow my father got mad. While he still conducted the services and did his work, after a fashion, he was really a raving lunatic, and my mother's one haunting fear was lest the doctor should give the right name to the illness and he should be taken away from her before she died. Didn't you wonder why I never had a servant, and sent away your charwoman?"

"I thought," said James with averted eyes, "I thought it was poverty and—and pride. How stubborn you were!"

"I was obliged to have the house to myself. Of course, I hadn't much sleep," she said, simply, "and the things one could eat were for them. And there was a good deal to do. It got quite easy to take whiskey, or brandy, or anything that chanced to be at hand. One forgot everything but the work that had to get done somehow."

"How in the devil's name did you, in face of all this, how did you do the work you did for my people through all the strike and fever?" James burst out. "How did you do it?"

"It was a stimulant, like the other—and you—" She stopped short, got white, and laughed. "But nothing could make you understand the sort of things that keep a woman going. But that's how it was! It's like an evangelical tract, isn't it, instructive and rather dull, and not the least like me? But I want to get finished, and when I am, then I've done with Elinor Moore, and so are you, and we're the only two concerned with her in the whole wide world. From henceforth I'm Mrs. Thorpe, wife of the curate of Falde. But will I ever be able to teach this to you? Well! Oh, James, don't look away from me all the time! That's awful! Oh, well! It all went on.

"The poor angel who went mad grew madder, and my mother sadder, and—I—I grew weaker—I think and—all sorts of things seemed to be gnawing at me, and you were at Oxford and in laboratories most of the time. And I wanted to get rid of myself. Who was it said that he made a beast of himself in order to get rid of the pain of being a man? I used to feel like that sometimes. And in the end—oh!—I suppose I got rather ill, and then one day—the day before the long vacation—why did you come up a day too soon, James?—you came in and found me—don't dear!—you found me drunk. I have seen many women drunk, and one gentlewoman, and—oh! I know just how you felt!"

She stood up slowly and laid her hand on the chimney-piece. She was tall, taller than his shoulder, and need lift her head but slightly to look into his eyes.

"Yet in spite of it, you did for me what no other man has ever done for any other woman——"

"For God's sake!"

"It was the way you did it, James," said she, with the sudden elfish gleam that sometimes shot through her eyes; "it was an education for you, wasn't it? And liberal! And—and then they both died—and they were not divided! That was you, too!"

He looked at her long slender hands and shining, pink, exquisitely kept nails.

"Women like you," he said, in a low, broken voice,

"were never made to bear such misery. It is bad enough to think of one of you even witnessing it. You were meant for the days when women went delicately like Agag, never for these stirring times!"

"But I did have a good time those two years, James."

"I ought to have seen to you better."

"I should have been glad if you had come oftener—but—I knew—I didn't expect you."

"It was a mistake. I——"

"It wasn't a mistake. In the intervals when I was resting from the good times I argued it all out, and came to the conclusion that I was best left alone—that sort of alone—you know, just then. You don't believe in God, if I remember?"

"I believe in my own God."

"The godliest can do no more! And I believe in mine. I believe, also, in the literal words of the Bible, that He's in me, and around me, and about me. I used to think it out, whenever I lay awake, those two years. And, don't you see, so long as I believe this, nothing will induce me not to believe in myself. Of course, this didn't come at once. For ever so long I just wallowed amongst my own ruins! I sat like a ghoul amongst the tombs and howled. I called 'miserable sinner!' with the best of them. I did every mortal thing I ought to do. And then one day, quite suddenly, the spirit of the builder seized upon me. My first stimulus was remembering that I had seen an old mended china plate of my mother's outline a dozen whole ones. That reminded me that a great deal depends upon the clay. And all at once it seemed a pity to let good material mould away under a mourning cloak. The spirit of the builder, the repairer, got hold of me, and I set to work. And you look more than ever like a blank wall! James, don't look like that! I wonder if you know what it means to a woman to see a man looking ashamed of himself, because she happens to have lost her rights?"

"I was only thinking," said James, humbly, "what a cad I've been—in lots of ways. As if you weren't yourself! if you've lost any rights, you'll win them back."

We've been away from each other so long, I must have forgotten a little, I think."

"You haven't forgotten, dear, and neither have I. No woman forgets what it is to see the best of her going out. One may light it up again. I will. But meanwhile, when one is gathering fuel out in the cold!"

"Couldn't you have told me something of this before? Couldn't you have written?"

"No! I couldn't. Can't you see, I couldn't?—not while the things were happening." She sat quite silent for a minute, her dark head resolute and erect.

"Now, James, listen," she said, at last, her voice low and firm. "I'm going to take back all my tremours, all my fears of ghosts and theories and bogies. I'm going to hedge violently, and throw science to the winds."

"Has it never struck you that, if we don't look out, with this slovenly spread of knowledge, heredity will become the excuse for every meanness, the scapegoat for every coward! Heredity is no more than any other circumstance, after all. And if we can defy one circumstance, we can defy another!"

Her eyes were suddenly brilliant with eager light.

"James, do you think, do you think, that even if I had a little child some day, that all I've learnt and suffered won't count? Oh! James, rebuilding yourself is hard work, and it's lonely. You see, even you couldn't help me, except indirectly. And you have to do it—if you do it at all—honestly, bit by bit, blow by blow. Do you think that nothing of all this would come to my little child? Do you think it would necessarily be a throwback to that other woman who was me? Oh! don't try to say something scientific! Your face speaks the truth!"

"Well," she went on abruptly, "I came across Herbert, trying to catch consumption at Davos and to put a soul into a clod not ready for one. Curates, I have found, are much more impatient than God. And being in a building mood, I looked at things with a builder's eye. Here were two people, a man and a woman, who must be incomplete till the crack of doom, alone, but together

might make a fairly decent whole. And when I looked forward to the time when my good time must come to an end, everything looked lonely, somehow. Besides, though it was a very good time indeed, it ran in spasms. It wanted—oh! you know—more of a sustained, regular effort to keep the like of me going. I thought I should find that in Herbert.”

“Oh!” Elinor laughed.

“You know nothing about it, James. A saint, short of a buttress or two, who runs too much to spire, can fill up a good deal of a woman’s time! I couldn’t have kept on working for myself, and by myself. I—I wanted something to hold on by. There were so many silent evenings ahead of me, and long nights, and grey, and groans!”

“Oh! my poor girl!” he muttered.

“You know what living in factory towns is? I knew—knew I couldn’t hold out. And, you know, Herbert always wanted me. And I wanted to be with a little child, whom one would—would not dare to offend. And——”

She paused and looked at him.

“But that’s another story, and I’ve talked so much!”

He saw her lean her arm heavily on the chimney-piece and steady herself quietly! But what could a man say?

“James, do you think I’m making it all too easy? Do you think I’m tempting fate because I don’t—don’t grovel before it? I wonder how you’d like yourself to live in the house with a saint,” she said, with soft-toned vehemence, “under the persevering white light of church tapers! and you’re you—and I’m—myself!”

“Sometimes I think it would really have been easier to—to have become a saint on my own account, or a temperance reformer, or—or a prophetess, or a platform orator. There are several careers open to one of my temperament.”

“Oh! my dear! My dear! I know——”

“Oh! James! you don’t. But you must trust me, utterly, James, when it gets altogether too bad. This sort of thing is bad, you know. Never to feel quite

secure, to have to envy the right and gay inconsequence while you're quite young still, makes one feel somehow dragged." Her proud, fastidious face twitched, almost imperceptibly. She shivered slightly. "When it gets too hard, I'm going to stay with your mother and work amongst your people. Some day this village may seem too little. The air may get rather confined."

"Elinor! It's not the life for you. Why—"

"It is the life for me. I chose it. I'd choose it again. It's what I want. I must have perfection to look at. I must have the unfallen heart near me. I must have absoluteness. Limitation is a nothing to me, if the perfection is really perfect. You don't understand everything. You don't understand what—what, for example, living up to blue china means. If I could have stood it, a nunnery would have been just the right thing for me. I tried one for a month, and found it utterly impossible. However, Herbert is almost as good for me, and entirely possible."

She paused and looked at him; then she looked away out into the dark garden, silently.

Presently he saw the glint of mockery slip from her eyes and mouth, and the drooped head lift itself so that the firm, resolute chin formed a straight line with the beautiful cloudy widow's peak, and upon her whole face there was a fine, grave nobility.

"Elinor! Elinor! I wanted to see you happy."

"From the higher point of view, I have no rights, at all, in happiness," she said, slowly. "At the same time, I don't believe that any existence ought to be a foregone failure. You might as well believe in predestination at once and open the latch for yourself. That would be the easiest way, after all. But I can't think that any one is *meant* to accept failure, therefore, somehow and some day, I mean to be happy. I don't think I quite know what happiness means," she said, her eyes, even in the darkness, turning towards the garden; "but I know it's the most beautiful, and the most rare thing in the whole wide world, and by hook or by

crook I mean to have it! Right or no right, I mean to have the best!"

"I believe you will. You're one of those women who could wrestle with God and prevail."

"We could, all of us, for some one else. Most of us spend our lives in doing it. We hardly notice, in the effort, that we're being passed over ourselves. The true woman takes that for granted. I'm not a true woman. I'm not made like that a bit. I could not, for the life of me, take being passed over for granted. There are two sorts of women and two sorts of lives for them. One walks by habit, by sheer reflex action, on the shady side of the street, and accepts what's given her—and for harvest, gathers weariness. The other goes out into the full sunshine and takes what she wants."

"And comes to grief," said James, hastily.

"You're as conservative as a woman, James. Sometimes she gathers joy! Don't worry, however. Just now I shall be pure womanly, and often miserable enough, and just make Herbert happy. I don't, however, mean to be knocked out eventually." Her whole face was twitching a little. "But one has to believe in justice; one is left no choice in the matter; and the mills of God do grind rather small and very slow. One can't be happy in a plunge. It's just the old story. Before ascending into Heaven you must go down into hell, whether you will or not, and work up. At the same time, I don't mean to die until I have lived a little!"

James lifted his fearful eyes to look at her, and her look inspired his dulness, for he was shocked to the soul.

"The best victories are born of defeat," he said. "Oh! my dear, you'll be happy yet!"

"If you say it, I will. You might have said it before. I wish you knew more of women. And yet I'm glad you don't! Meanwhile I decline to be labelled. I'm not a woman with a past. All that was yesterday, and this is to-day, and I'm of to-day, and not of yesterday. And, James, when will you grasp this fact? When I'm a bishop's wife, you'll still be thinking of Elinor Moore; you'll still be afraid for me. That's man for you!

Nothing can happen without him in it! Can't you see—can't you see—there's a lot of woman in you? Try to see with that; then you will understand that so long as I am afraid of myself, it will be quite enough. I don't want your fears. I have enough of my own. I want your faith."

He knew she was quivering. His eyes dropped to the ground, and he flushed. Then he stooped and kissed her hands, one after the other. But he hadn't a word to say. Pity and despair for all women kept him dumb.

When he had gone, Elinor quivered on a little, quiet enough. She quivered till her knees shook, and her heart, swinging like a pendulum, seemed to beat her down. Then she saw that the fire was going out, and she put a force upon herself and ceased from her foolishness.

"I'm glad," she said, while she blew upon the coals, "I'm glad he's saved for better things. I'm glad it was I—who—who saved him. I'm gladder than—than—anything that Herbert is a saint. I—I—"

Then somehow the poker rattled down on the fender, and Elinor wagged from side to side oddly. She grasped wildly at the stout arm-chair, missed it, and huddled together in a cold heap on the rug, her head shrugged into her knees like a squirrel.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE consequences of her reckless act of charity were following hot-foot upon Cecilia.

Anthony, philosophical and suspicious, charged with carefully-selected fragments of strange lore, was looking out thoughtfully for a folly to fit each tag.

Jock, with an ineffable air of doing nothing and being without a care in the world, infinitely harassed nevertheless and immersed in honest labour, was a sight to unhinge any girl's mind. Honest labour can do a lot for a man, and the effect of worry upon emotion is surprising; but the busiest must pause; and it's in the pauses that things happen!

And with the girl, if only she knew it, made for the leisure of man, and his depressed moments! But even her ignorance, her misconception of her sphere of influence, added in an annoying way to her attractions.

A young man with the blatant egoism of youth not yet purged from his members, in default of editing himself, likes by way of change to edit a girl. He can introduce so much of himself in the process.

Besides with Joyce, humble now because of moral doubt, sweet with the budding of new points of view, her eyes two veiled suns that threw an innocent challenge to enterprise; her mouth grave with expectation; in short, in the stimulus of her new surroundings gathering in beauty with both hands, every time she entered a room she sent a new fear shooting through Cecilia's heart, and a new delight. For in every twist and turn of the girl she could see her own self. And, more entrancing still, and more wonderful! so also could Jock, in a way.

But this was an insidious temptation to be strenuously resisted!

Of James, pure and simple, Mrs. Hallowes' opinion,

from the sound and practical point of view, was rising daily.

But James as a circumstance was disheartening.

A man so serious-minded, so wanting in agility, so proud and so humble, was never made to carry off love with a high hand. Under the dispensation he must be at his worst and look it. Mrs. Hallowes fairly quaked at the thought of the pranks his temperament might not set this worldly man to play; she dared not hasten the climax.

The delicious contrast of Jock in a like condition, when she thought of it as applied to the untried mind of a girl, made Mrs. Hallowes giddy. Look where she would, she could find no uncomplicated alleviation, no simple solution. The outlook was alarming—and mostly of her own making. Had she been a feebler woman, Mrs. Hallowes might well have sunk into a condition of vain and morbid repentance. She was, however, a woman of an active mind and much courage, who preferred any day reparation to repentance. She had failed as a mother, setting Mercy before Justice; she had planted an unnecessary and absorbing obstacle in a young man's path.

It was her part now to remove this obstacle to safer keeping—with promptness, gentleness, discretion, and a due regard to the ultimate advantage of all concerned. Sooner said this than done, however, for until she could discern in James some symptom of being able to play the fool without making a fool of himself, obviously he must not be hurried. To plunge the girl back upon the tender mercies of Betty would not crystallise a host of floating emotions. To leave things to nature would be sheer lunacy.

In casting about for help in her dilemma, some vague but shrewd instinct suggested a diversion in the shape of Mrs. Thorpe. There was an innocent novelty about a curate's wife, who, absolutely above reproach, yet looked as though the last chapter of her life were yet to be written, and might hold astonishing developments. Such a lady would be very likely to engage the atten-

tion of an observant young man. In any case she must relieve the tension of his mind, and exercise his intelligence.

And this at the beginning of things was to do much.

It was in this way that Elinor slipped almost insensibly into the gentle life of Faldeholm. It all began by an old woman's bedside, was continued at a mothers' meeting, resumed at a meet of the hounds, where Elinor stood in a sort of restrained excitement, with the usual little tremour of her nostrils, and caused some blasphemy amongst the older generation that so interesting a personality should be lost upon a curate.

It culminated at dinner when Elinor sat at the Squire's left hand. A much more important personage sat on his right. But Anthony had a chivalrous feeling in regard to clerical women, and Elinor's dress looked like a mist of silver, and she herself extremely handsome. The other lady, on the contrary, was an ill-favoured dame, and always took the Squire's appetite away. Fortunately, however, she was good-natured, and preferred on the whole the joys of mastication to the conversation of her host.

Sport proving inefficient, and village politics discouraging, Elinor, in her serene, straightforward way, told a story or two of the great coal-strike which came near to beggar James Coates, and the devastating fever that followed hard upon it. And with a few light touches, her husband stood out through the whole a peaceful, pure, and radiant preserver, which filtered into the mind and worked there. At breakfast the next morning, the Squire remarked with some acidity, "That if so fine a woman could overlook the saint in a man, and thrive on it, it would be no more than neighbourly if we were all to try to treat him as though he were a human being."

In the afternoon, finding the rector even more pig-headed than usual in the matter of a ruffianly guardian, he went on to the curate's, and since that indefatigable person was at the other end of the parish, he had it out with the fellow's wife, over their tea, and for a woman found her surprisingly reasonable. So reasonable indeed,

that merely to encourage sanity in unexpected places, he gave in upon a point which had troubled the village now for a matter of ten years, and whenever he thought of it, caused the rector to snort.

This was the one thing for which Cecilia never quite forgave Mrs. Thorpe. She had herself broached the banned subject to Anthony and been defeated.

The fact, however, proving beyond need of further demonstration the value of Mrs. Thorpe as an ally, Mrs. Hallowes put self aside and strengthened the bonds of the new friendship.

Elinor had to get herself a little used to being with James before she could trouble to consider Joyce at all. It took her some little time longer to consider her as the inevitable crown to James' happiness.

Her passionate anxiety to find out at first blurred her outlook. But after a little her quiet persistent effort after self-control, the clear, gentle atmosphere of Cecilia, but above all the unutterable relief of being able to discuss everything with Herbert truthfully, abating no atom of the intensity of her interest and none of her fears, brought her back at last to clearer vision. And when she saw James walking across the glistening dead heather to meet her one morning, she was ready for anything he might have to say.

As it happened he had nothing to say, but his eyes were eloquent.

She darted out her hand impulsively and laid it on his arm, and her eyes shone with swift tears.

"It's nice of you to tell me like this! And, James, I'm the first to know?" she cried, with a jealous pang.

"Elinor! Of course you are!"

"And you can have her?"

"I can have her—if—but I love her! and the whole world is—fresh with dew! And that's enough for the moment, isn't it?" He caught her arm and swung her round towards the sun.

"You're in no hurry. They want you down there at the house, but I want you more. Let us get up into the sunlight on the hill. I wish it was a mountain. I want

to stretch my legs. How light you are for your height. I wonder how light she would be? I wish—"

In bucketting up the hill he neglected to complete the sentence. And up in the dancing sunshine, with the keen moor air blowing the half-frozen incense out of the heather, Elinor was wondering just how much more ecstasy she would be able to stand.

She underrated her powers of endurance, however. For James' sake she could have stood most things.

But to see the radiance—the first that for many years she had perceived upon it—drop from his face and the old gravity take hold of it and set it hard, tried her greatly.

"Are you thinking of Jock Hallows?" she said, softly.

"Jock Hallows! Good Lord! no! I'm thinking of her. Of course my happiness would be—perfect. But could I make as sure of hers?"

"Jock Hallows is also in love with her, or going to be, and he's thinking of himself. You'll find him a formidable rival."

"Don't be cynical, not to-day, dear."

"If you speak the truth just as you think it in short words, you're quite certain to be called cynical. You surprised me just now. But I always made sure it wasn't in you to go the right way about loving—I too can preach from that text. The moment comes when a man can't think of himself any longer, so inevitably she slips in."

"If a man isn't quite sure of being able to make a woman ridiculously happy, he oughtn't to marry her. That is, if she's too pure, and clear, and exquisite to throw dust in a man's eyes—afterwards."

James flung a little frown at her, and her heart leapt. Even this supreme moment hadn't wiped her out!

"A woman gives so much——"

"A man doesn't go empty-handed."

"You wouldn't look at a woman—you'd be afraid of her children if you'd thrown any unnecessary shade upon her life. The mother of children ought to be joyous. It's the children's right."

He was looking down steadily at the chimney-pots of Faldeholm, so Elinor's quick little falter escaped him.

"A woman is the fount of happiness in a household."

"Figure that out and it means that a woman mostly exhausts the fount pumping it into man."

"So long as he reflects it back, she's content. Observe that we're speaking of the True Woman."

"Some men are grasping. They demand more in a wife than a mirror."

"Modesty forms a pleasing and surprising incident in the wooing of a man, but it makes a bad foundation. Unless of course the woman has the sense to recognise it—as in your case—for crass, stiff-necked abominable pride."

James chuckled.

"You're quite wrong. If you knew how small her utter belief in the elevation of my mind makes me feel."

"Wait until you've kissed her," said Elinor, softly. "That will change everything! Then if you don't feel strong enough to hold up the world with those great shoulders of yours, oh! James, don't marry her! If she can't do that much for you, she's Delilah, or a fool!"

"I could do a good deal with—her."

"Or without her. You neither know how much you can do, nor how much you want, nor how much you can surrender. Above all, you want the right woman." She narrowed her eyes to look at him.

"You overestimate a good woman, to be sure, but you have a keen eye for a bad one! And you couldn't love anything mean or trivial. But has she enough to give you?"

"She has——"

"Oh! we can't all be James' in love! I wish I knew—I wish I knew. If she is—if she is the right one, the only possible right one, you'll make her happy, and, James, I'll go on my knees to serve you and her!"

"As if I didn't know! Elinor, I never knew before how beautiful you are! Are you beautiful? That part never struck me. There are so many to think of, whenever one looks at you."

"So far I've never been a beauty, but people think of me."

"Standing there now you're a beauty!"

"That's because you're happy and think I am! Some beauty is there always like a flower, ready to be plucked. Some waits until it is called for. It wants the right touch to bring it out. I'm quite content to know that I could be a beauty if the call came."

He fetched up sharp to stare at her.

"I'm glad I know how beautiful you can be. Perhaps some day——"

"Perhaps some day!—James, shall we run down the hill together once more as we ran down the little foothill near Didot? Would *she* mind?"

"Mind! Mind *you*, Elinor! Come! If there was a rainbow, I could snatch the pot of gold from under its foot and bring it back before the colours faded out. Do you remember the rainbow that stood over Snowdon that morning?"

"Good-bye," panted Elinor, when they reached the bottom.

"Hang it all! You're not going?"

"No! I'm just saying good-bye to our old selves. It's hardly dignified for the wife of a future bishop to be slipping back into that little scrub Elinor Moore. And you—why, you'll be going into Parliament presently——"

"Thorpe certainly would look splendid on the Bench. But, Elinor, you won't get fat."

"No, I'll do everything just right. And I mean to exterminate the patient ass type of wife from amongst my curates. I'll make her be happy. Saving souls is altogether beyond my ken, but I can just grasp the blessedness of making hearts light. And, James, I'm glad on the whole that Jock Hallows is also in love with her! He'll help in her development. She needs an impetus more emphatically pagan than you to spur her forward."

"I wish it hadn't been Jock. Anything else!"

"Any meaner rival would have been the death of you! Think of a man of no account presuming to love Joyce Anstiss!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALTHOUGH Jock's dreams, when not engaged upon foxes, were getting in a general way tinged with Joyce, his waking eyes saw little else ahead of him than an ugly and uninspiring grind.

The more soberly and consecutively did he go into his father's affairs—now by tacit consent and a gratifying absence of comment being cast piecemeal into his amazed hands—the more calamitous seemed the outlook.

The last steward, a theoretical person of poetic temperament, whose hopes invariably outran his discretion, had hampered the harassed property with a host of expensive beginnings, mostly of impractical schemes.

These, one and all, were cut off in early youth by some doubt in the unstable mind of their originator, a doubt coupled always with lack of funds.

Being at last cut off himself by a consumption, the Squire called an interregnum, seized the reins, and in his turn mismanaged the groaning estate.

At the outset of his stewardship, therefore, Jock's chief hope lay in the reversion of a property belonging to a grand-uncle, which in the natural course of events must eventually come to him. When, now, for the first time, he was made aware of the breaking of the entail of these lands, and the manner of its severance, he laughed and said nothing. But when the watchful eye of the lawyer was removed from off him, and the door shut on his outraged back, Jock whistled mirthlessly a merry tune.

The uncle, as eccentric as Anthony, and with a nasty temper, which he always used to his own advantage, had, it seems, demanded the cutting off of the entail after a fashion carefully designed to sting every drop of the Squire's proud blood into frenzied action.

By the next post, without so much as a hint to his

lawyer, who nearly died of the disastrous deed, Anthony gave his consent to the rupture, comforting himself by veiling the missive in all the irony and invective gathered in a sixty years' erratic diggings into musty tomes. But for the better easing of his spirit he forestalled it by a magnificent telegram, couched in terms of pure Saxon.

For years now—since the signing of the baleful paper indeed—nothing had been heard from the old man directly; indirectly they knew that his habits grew daily more objectionable. Likewise that a fierce silent woman of doubtful antecedents ruled his establishment; and exacted from every man, woman, and child upon the estate unwilling homage.

For a week after hearing and digesting the details of this disconcerting affair, Jock felt a chill quiver of uncertainty whenever he thought of it, but the fire and glory of youth were fast burning out and winnowing to the winds this hampering doubt.

Try as he would, Jock could not shut the green acres of Brent out of his future. He judged the present by the past, and the birthright of youth is to have what it wants. And after all, the youth that cannot lay hold upon this primeval faith will be like enough to go empty-handed till the day whereon he runs his head against the last blank wall that stands waiting ever for the faint heart.

So far, however, Jock's confidence, either in himself or in fate, had never been gainsaid. In defiance of old Sprowll's grunts, he still meant to get enough out of Brent to do a lot in the matter of squaring things. Possibly, he reflected with mounting courage, having seen Sprowll off the premises, he might square things even in time to get some fun out of Wake's expedition.

He had been working hard all that morning wading through the harrying details of over-mortgaged farms. By slashing freely into law terms, he had succeeded in figuring out the situation clear enough to his own understanding. He had likewise submitted to Sprowll a suggestion or two which, although received with lifted eyebrows, were by this time getting acclimatized in that gentleman's mind, and would to-morrow, when translated

into legal language and set forth upon official paper, be submitted proudly to their author's consideration as Sprowll's own.

This artless gentleman, long used to manage the county, failed to grasp the significance of any modern innovation raw from Oxford. And young Hallowes' imperviousness to legal terms argued a frivolous mind.

The work which Jock was doing was hard and depressing enough, and a good deal more of the same sort lay in his path. It was free neither of embarrassment nor of shame, for Jock had a boyish uncritical affection for his father, and an honest pride in his old name. But in spite of all the harassing unpleasantness in the business, it all went to untie the hands of new powers. And the taste of possessing the earth is sweet in a man's mouth.

Having decided thereupon to take Brent for granted, Jock lit his pipe, and the thought of Joyce, as he had last seen her, breathless before a Eucharist lily, sprang up in his heart like a white flower. Joyce's dumb, pathetic, half-reluctant way of marvelling at beautiful things touched Jock oddly.

An old Persian cat, gifted beyond her kind, purred in a low basket chair which Jock had brought down out of the old nursery for his step-mother when she came to visit him, always with a glint of apology in her kind eyes, and a paper reeking of the law in her pocket.

Bran, the blind pointer dreaming of partridges long dead, chuckled on the hearth-rug. And outside the dripping of all the icicles which hung within reach of the warm chimney-pots made a sleepy patter of tuneful sound.

The peace was so like the peace that comes when the day's work is done, that a cricket lifted up his voice from behind the grate in a shrill song.

Cecilia knocked three times, and then came in unheard. She would have come in after the first knock but for that paper she held in her hand.

It was a bad fence this time, and Jock would have to take it standing.

Mrs. Hallowes held herself uncommonly erect, and

the unmistakable light of battle gleaned from out her mild eyes. This time there was to be no merciful huddling away of her tidings in her pocket. A big lawyer's letter made a hard ominous square upon her soft grey gown.

"I say, have you been knocking?" said Jock, putting the cat inside the fender and drawing forward the chair.

"Go on smoking," said Cecilia, with her grave smile, "for I have horrid news."

"The deuce!" said Jock, "Oh! well, out with it!"

"Old General Hallowes is dead, Jock, and he's left everything to a son who lives in France. The mother lives at Brent. He says they were legally married a year ago. And since, the entail having been already cut off, so late a reparation makes no difference to anything, we can only hope for his own sake that he speaks the truth. He has already enough to answer for."

"By Jove!" said Jock under his breath. She handed him the envelope, without a word, but while he read the enclosure through, not skipping a line, her knees jerked together.

She was old and had seen much sorrow, but to carry bad news to the young seemed to her more sorrowful than all the rest.

"What does the dad say?" said Jock, in a colourless sort of voice.

Cecilia started; she was not prepared for this question. She was sternly indignant with Anthony. The only bitter words that she had ever spoken to him had been spoken on this very subject, on this disastrous result of sheer vile temper.

Her heart was bleeding for Anthony's son, but her constitutional turn for mercy, the maidenly tinge of sentiment underlying her entire scheme of life, and hampering every action, in the end prevailed.

Striving to excise all undesirable pathos from her voice, with a look that would have moved a stone, she began: "He said very little, Jock. He was silent for a long time. He only just said 'God forgive me, but if ever Jock does, it will be only my age and his breeding

that'll make him.' Then from force of habit, dear, he swore a little."

Although she had bitterly repented of the violence of her language some time before upon the same subject, at this moment Cecilia felt immensely relieved in that she had testified boldly of that which was in her.

Jock might possibly think her over-lenient, but never could Anthony fall into that crass error!

"Poor old dad," said Jock, "he must feel beastly. Of course I know about breaking the entail. But somehow one gets into the way of thinking that things will pull round all right."

"So they will," said Cecilia, "with you at the helm."

Something in the little woman's voice roused Jock to look at her.

"By Jove! You have a lot of faith. Wait till you know me more."

"I know enough to know that my faith is well founded. You were an honest boy, who told no lies, even to get out of the very bad scrapes into which your inexorable determination to have your own way were constantly plunging you."

In spite of approaching disaster, Jock grinned.

"You counted on Brent to reopen the coal-mine, didn't you, Jock, and to exploit the iron?"

"But how came you to hear of that?"

"They are so poor in the village and so dreadfully patient," said Cecilia, a note of scorn in her delicate voice.

"If work doesn't come to them, they sit groaning in Methodist meetings to wait for it. I have always longed for some constant, manly occupation for the poor creatures to give them a little backbone and reconcile them to the church, and that idle coal-mine would be just the thing. So I spoke to Mr. Coates about it one day, and he told me. One so seldom has the—the privilege of associating with persons of proven business abilities. Our neighbourhood is so singularly theoretical. It's quite delightful to meet with one who sticks to pure practice. Oh! Jock, think of the sums expended in the last ten years upon experimental patent manures."

"I'd rather not," said Jock, laughing. "Oh, well! the coal and iron must wait a bit. What we've got to do now is to save the land."

"But surely it's the coal and iron that will save the land," she said, eagerly.

"They have to be got at first."

"Mr. Coates says," she continued, nervously, "that £3,000 would do everything."

"We could as soon lay hands on £3,000 as on £30,000; and I'd rather face the devil than another mortgage. Besides, I doubt if we'd get one except from James. In his case it would furnish an excuse for benevolence. Anyway, we can retrench," said Jock, trying to look philosophical. "It isn't absolutely necessary to hunt, I suppose, and the shooting and fishing are worth something. I daresay a bout of poverty will be good for our souls."

"Better stick to the truth in this serious matter," said Cecilia, primly. "Poverty is good neither for the body nor the soul. It is a vampire that sucks the blood, and it prefers it young and of the best. I was poor once," she said, stiffly, "and sometimes even now I feel the shadow of it upon me. And—I knew some one—he was a boy—" Suddenly the eyes were young and bright. "I think he was rather a kingly boy—then, but he was poor also, and—his regal quality soon vanished. Boys and girls—those born to lord it—in the sun," she went on hurriedly, "can't live amongst the shadows and grow—they dwindle. They just exist. And existing is very bad for the morals; it takes the sting out of evil and the heart out of joy. It levels everything."

Jock stared at her, unabashed, but it was always Joyce he saw, Joyce when she had grown a little tender.

"Oh! Jock, loving and giving is the right of our tribe, and it's righteous to fight for our rights," she said, with a little pale flush, lifting her small white head proudly. "Jock, we won't be poor! And most certainly you shall not give up hunting or let the shooting either."

"Only too glad to oblige," said Jock. "What do you propose?"

"I always distrusted your great-uncle," she pursued,

with some irrelevance. "I met him once years ago—but even then my hair was white—perhaps it was that," observed Cecilia, darkly. "Whatever it may have been, his conversation was exceedingly reprehensible, and he told a dreadful story about a good woman. I remember being uncharitable enough then to hope that before he died he might be afflicted with an evil one. And he has been," said Cecilia, meekly, "very sadly afflicted indeed."

"Don't bother about being sorry then."

"I knew you'd never get an acre of Brent, Jock, so I have the three thousand quite ready. It's in the bank. I put it there in your name."

"But—where the deuce did it come from?"

"Why, from me, of course! Why should we delay anything?" she said, quickly. "The frost will break directly. The farms haven't half enough work for the people, and the coal is so dear." She was flushing deeper under Jock's stare, while Jock's collar seemed to be throttling him.

"Oh! I say! This is impossible, of course!"

"Jock!"

"Look here, Mrs. Hallowes," said Jock, standing up. He felt he could say more if he were standing above her. "I went over to the Rawsons one day a few months ago. A prize bull had just been spiked, so they were all rather up in arms against the injustice of Heaven. Indeed, the poor beast seemed to have unhinged the family completely; among other things he had unloosed the tap of its fount of sympathy."

Jock paused to catch the thread of his parable.

"It takes a good deal to do that," said Cecilia, nervously.

"It does. It took a prize bull. But it fairly flowed that day. Anyway, when they had gone over the grievances of all the relations, they set on to you. They told me the hash that Colonel Drayton had made of your affairs, and just exactly how much he left you," said Jock, stammering vilely. "I know I felt pretty sick when I thought of all the sovereigns I used to snaffle out of you all these years."

"Jock! I didn't think it was in you to make me feel so—apologetic. A son will take a good deal from a mother. He'll take her heart, her peace, and her hope, and every penny she's got. And you feel taking even this from me! Is it necessary to show me so plainly that I'm only your step-mother, Jock?"

"Oh! hang it all! You know——"

"Jock! if you won't take it from me, in the end you'll have to take it from Mr. Coates. This sort of thing should be kept in the family. At least I'm your father's wife. His good name is something to me, also. Don't make me feel an outsider, Jock."

"I wonder if you know into what a corner you're shoving me, Mrs. Hallowes!"

"Ah! he can't forget! I'm only that," she thought, wincing.

"There are so many things to think of, Jock. If bailiffs don't presently oust us from our warm home, the dry rot soon will," said Cecilia, oracularly. "You have no conception of the bolstering up that this old black-beamed house requires. The garden takes everything. To deny flowers all they need, is like denying children. Your father can't do it."

"Mrs. Hallowes, Sprowll tells me that my father's done nothing at all in the way of a marriage settlement."

"My dear Jock! Think of your father's worries about that time! It never occurred to him——"

"Sprowll——"

"Mr. Sprowll's intelligence may be limited, but he knows better than not to seize upon any opportunity for the practice of economy."

"That's all rot! You——"

"Oh, Jock! I was only too delighted to be at such a scandalous household. Those unutterable working house-keepers! It was pathetic, my dear Jock! and disgraceful."

"If they had attended to it, I could take the money as a loan——"

"Now you'll take it as a gift."

"And rob you of your independence."

"I don't want independence. I want a home. If the very worst came, I should only be dependent upon you, and I shouldn't mind that in the least; and you can't think what a light burden I should be! But the worst couldn't happen. There's no sluggish blood in your veins. Where's the fear? When I think of Mr. Coates, of his fine courage, his enterprise, the risks he ran in that dreadful time of trial, and with his blood!" Cecilia lifted her chiselled nose.

"It's good, honest blood. His mother's a brick!"

"I have the biggest regard for Mr. Coates. Far be it from me to disparage his blood. But in the sheer nature of things it must be slow, it must be turbid."

"Oh, well! So far from any centre of civilisation. I suppose you would submit it to chemical analysis." Here Cecilia's maidenhood prevailed. She broke in primly.

"In centres of civilisation, so I am led to suppose, they confine themselves to subjecting the God that made them to chemical analysis."

"Well, perhaps so. But you see this won't do. What would you think yourself of a man who lived on a woman?"

Jock's hands were moving nervously in his pockets.

"A man who could be guilty of such depravity would put it differently."

"The utterance of a blank truth sometimes gives one a righteous appearance."

"This—this is unworthy of you! However," said Cecilia, bridling, "there's a means of escape at your very gates."

"What! Good Lord, Betty! She's a jolly girl. I like her awfully. But if I wanted to plunge on that sort of venture, I'd go farther afield. You can't very well look upon a girl you've made hay and blown bubbles with as an income."

"An American then, I suppose," said Cecilia, pensively.

"Oh! well, an American's used to the business, no doubt, and would be likely to make it amusing. And if

she doesn't happen to remind you of an American breakfast, she's ripping."

"Oh, Jock! there's time enough for everything. Try me before you support yourself on—foreign pork."

"Oh, well! I'll pull on a bit before I try the last refuge——"

"But in the meantime. If the little I have to offer isn't enough, you can still try the American—and pay me back out of her surplus hogs, Jock! You never knew your own mother; *that* needn't come between us, dear."

"Hang it all! It's rather hot on a chap to say things like that, you know."

Confused, embarrassed, his neck burning like hot iron under his collar, he looked down at her.

The face that met his, grave, eager, sincere, had upon it the beauty which only years—years of true thinking and simple praying and the giving out of kindness can impress upon the face of a woman. And her eyes were like Joyce's.

But there was a want somewhere. Even Jock in his insolent swaggering youth saw this, and looked again closely for the cause. And of a sudden his own kindness and sympathy gave him wisdom. He knew vaguely what the hunger in the woman's eyes meant. All these years she had given, given—given out of a full heart. But the poor little thing had received back nothing but just the little shavings and shreds from the margins of other lives. She had always been an outsider—had stood always in a step-relationship to all her little world.

"It's too bad to let her keep on feeling like a step-mother, anyway," thought Jock.

"After all," said he, with an odd laugh, "in spite of all the heroics, I can't have a very fine sense of honour, for now I look at you I really don't mind a hang being beholden to you. We'll shake hands on it, and save all we can together."

"Oh!" she said. "We'll save everything."

"We'll break it to Sprowll to-morrow," went on Jock rapidly—he was so glad to get the air clear of sentiment,

"and ask James to tackle him about the iron. There's too much bustle and nervous exhaustion about iron at our very doorstep for Sprowll's taste. It reminds him of the modern Babylon and agnosticism."

In spite of his efforts Jock could not keep his eyes off his step-mother. He half turned to go out, then he turned back.

"I say, St. Cecilia! I wish you'd try—you know, to get little Miss Anstiss to take an—an interest in your God. There's something uncanny in a girl who's above having a God. When she happens to get into a tight place, or wants to help some one out of it, she must feel awful without one. And I hardly think she'd better yours. You're both lovers of perfection. A lover of perfection without anything in the shape of a God is rather rum, don't you think?"

Jock dived for his hat. "By Jove! it's twelve, and I said I'd be at the pond at a quarter to."

"You'd better hurry, then," said Cecilia, turning to stir the fire, lest Jock might see her foolish wet eyes.

If he did not see them, however, he knew that they were there; and as soon as he got the door between him and Cecilia he paused to consider if he had not better go back and say something. An impulsive hand was already upon the door knob, when he heard a murmur of silk petticoats faltering slowly across the room.

He snatched his hand from the knob, jammed his hat on his head, and fled.

"By Jove! that was a close shave!" he murmured, as he strolled across the frozen lawn.

"How delightful!" thought Cecilia, still wet-eyed—she had only been going to the window to watch Jock—"how delightful to live with people who are never in a hurry. So much of my life has gone in being hurried. Sickness is, I fear, a little demoralising to the manners. But I think that even in a sick-room Jock would be still a gentleman. It is a severe test for a man! It is restful to observe a young man who will get all he wants in a leisurely atmosphere. Jock can lead delightfully, but it's not in him to drive, thank God!"

Upon the day that Lady Rawson had been moved to loving-kindness for those outside the family by the destruction of her prize bull, Cecilia's fortune had been just a third more than it now stood at. But of this Jock was happily ignorant.

"It will be strange to have no income whatsoever," thought she, passing her hand softly over her gown. "I am thankful that at my age fashions don't change. Old Colonel Drayton was no doubt negligent; he was deeply afflicted in his family, and I daresay lost heart. But, thank God! he left me all my grandmother's lace. I can always look like the mistress of Faldeholm."

She lifted her silken skirts with a new haughtiness and went softly to the morning-room. Hitherto, out of respect to the polishing of her oaken floors, after her initial raid upon the old order, of course, she had permitted them to trail. But now all her little private habits must be ordered anew.

The mere thought of asking for money for such intimate concerns would not have occurred to Cecilia. She was made after another fashion altogether.

Amongst the other great things of life which Cecilia had missed, she had missed the full, pulsing, uplifting power of demand. She had learned to take all the personal things thankfully with a little falter, and to expect nothing.

"Not for Jock's sake," she reflected, when she had sat down again. "Certainly not for Jock's sake. That aspect of the question should hardly interest me; but for the poor girl's own sake," said Cecilia presently, as she gazed idly into the fire, "I must try to—to insert the thin edge of the wedge. A love of perfection, coupled with insufficient amusement, and no God, would indeed be likely to develop untender qualities. Mr. Coates deserves a better fate. Even he—although he did say that religion is very much a matter of environment—I feel assured in my mind, would prefer a girl with the fear of God in her heart."

She looked out at her beds of waiting bulbs under their cherishing coverings of ashes. This ever-recurring

lovely parable of life, this nursing into life by the cold dead, after a short musing made her forget Joyce as an obstacle. She could only think of her as a human soul to be softened.

"I have heard strange things of the God of the Progressive Radicals—rather the gods. That party seems to have monopolised a freedom of choice in this great matter as in all the smaller ones," she thought presently, looking still at the beds. "But I fancy, if in the pitiful bustle of a Radical's life he can find room at all for a God, his God will be very like our own—like Him who was Everlasting before the first Radical was so much as dreamed of. And at any rate, before you can be a real woman, you must have a real God; and, be his politics what they may, a real man will prefer a real woman to a fragment of one—a mere experimentalist in womanhood."

CHAPTER XIX.

"EVERY crop, my dear Miss Anstiss, is pretty sure to fail when most you want it, except the crop of fools. You may always count upon that!"

Anthony's sentiments since his uncle's demise were more deeply tinged than ever with agricultural depression and a decadent race, the lurid colouring being for the moment aggravated by the stupid rectitude apparent upon the countenances of the company with whom he had just lunched in the market town. Simple, practical gentlemen these, who, loyal to their station as to all other institutions, had sacrificed themselves for many vain and weary years upon the altars of school and college, and having at last escaped exhausted from these mills, which in good sooth grind small, they had collected their wits with a view to consider things in a general sort of way.

In the beneficent pause, recognising the blessedness of rest, a select outlook, and the patriarchal life, they fixed their minds permanently upon the breeding of prize cattle, and were content thenceforth to gather their philosophies and trimmings of original thought from the *Times* newspaper.

They had a dependable rent-roll, however, these uneventful grovellers, and still some unpawned farms in tow. They had earned the right to cultivate and attain a marked family likeness to the beasts they fattened.

"They have their reward," sighed Anthony.

Joyce murmured her artless sympathy. It was a comfort to the harassed man to speak to the girl; she was so unpractical, so unsoiled of any vile commercial instinct; her critical faculty was so delightfully all wrong; her ignorance in all things which could or might hurt a man so sublime. Always a star peeping out of a cloud.

Pricked by parental solicitude, Anthony hoped to the Lord she'd remain there. Meanwhile he continued to address his remarks to her.

In the last week he had often felt restless when Jock was about, and had begun half shamefacedly to harbour suspicions of Cecilia's mild eye. The pleasant, purposeless dreaming of the kindly old blunderer was experiencing strange shocks. To ease his vague unrest he sought refuge, not in the society of the two who loved him dearly, and were straining thews and sinews, not alone to save him from the consequences of his egregious folly, but to conceal from his roving eyes their distasteful labours in the process, so that he might placidly scoop in stray tags of philosophy until the end. But it was not to these he turned, it was to the little hard girl who disapproved of him and all his works thoroughly, and was only prevented from telling him so by his age and the help and sustenance that any shocking example always affords the wobbling conscience.

Joyce, for her part, found it exhilarating to take observations upon the tricks which rank conservatism may play with a man; upon the condition to which it may reduce him.

Even the shameless liberties he took with the classic authors were a comfort to Joyce. They established more firmly within her her early dower of democratic principles. They were typical of hereditary slackness, state religion, the obsolete three-bottle man, and a retrograde mind.

Every twist and turn of the Squire, to the artless mind of Miss Anstiss, suggested unearned increment.

Meanwhile the two potted about together, and Joyce was picking up, as she went, the little indescribable ways of a woman who has lived all her days in a garden. She was gathering in slowly and fearfully her rights and royalties, and her eyes grew each day more kind.

Jock and James from the paddock saw the old man leaning on the girl, and the two hanging absorbed over a bed of Christmas roses which peered up through the

snow with enquiring yellow eyes; for snow had followed hard upon the black frost.

Jock's amusement broke into a laugh; but James stood dumb. He felt as though he stood in the dim aisle of some great church.

"He's abhorrent to her every instinct," said Jock. "All the same, Christmas roses don't make a bad bridge, and putting a man right in his quotations must soften the rigour of your judgment upon his principles."

"She couldn't learn the practice of toleration in a better school," said James. "Looking at Mrs. Hallowes alone would be enough to smooth down the bristles a life in the slums is apt to set shooting."

"But the echo will follow her," said Jock promptly. "She may trim a bit in the matter of politics, but she'll be always panting to do good. If it teaches her to shun smartness as she would the devil, it wasn't such a bad beginning after all!" he added, with a regal calm.

"Smartness! good Lord, where would she find it in Barham!" snorted the other.

"Oh! that sort of thing," said the one with experience, "doesn't depend upon the locality. It's in the air—like an epidemic."

Jock was a deal too wholesome and haughty and young to appreciate smartness in the women of his immediate neighbourhood.

James looked upon the women who count as shrines more or less, or essences.

"That's a ripping sort of thing she's got on her head," pursued Jock. James was thinking of Cherubim and the Divine Woman. The remark rather jarred on him. "The way she puts it on isn't Barham either," continued Jock, cheerfully. "It's nature. That girl's instincts may plant her in a rut or so to begin with," he said airily, swinging his stick, "but they'll land her right in the end."

"Her right may happen not to be yours."

"It wouldn't be so far off it as she might think—or you," said Jock, with an engaging swagger. "Lots of common-sense about Miss Anstiss; knows what's good

for her ; only the deuce of it is, she's afraid of it. However, when that wears off, she'll be all right. Look how the poor little thing's been hampered, ground down in a slum with a pack of—hum !—anyway, she's had the devil of a time." He fetched up to straighten a coop.

James groaned in all his depths. It was as much as he could do not to take to his heels and run.

"I wonder," said Jock from overhead, with a screw between his teeth, "if any one there had told her how pretty she is—they say women know it of themselves, but I feel it must want some—oh, you know, expert corroboration from outside—if it would have eased things a bit for her?" James, raging though he was, winced.

"As conveyed by the intelligence of young Barham, I doubt it."

Jock glanced at James. His eyes were fairly shooting out wrath. To attach any intimate personal significance to this astounding fact never so much as occurred to Jock. James was built for other uses.

"Now, that's a Radical all over," mused Jock, sagaciously ; "twice as fastidious as one of us. Great Scott! Supposing I had said that or looked it! Oh, well! the fellows were alive, weren't they, anyway?" he enquired, affably, "and had eyes in their heads? However, of course, I know nothing of Barham," said he, soothingly.

"Thinks it snobbery," thought James. "Oh! well, let him."

"I wonder what they're on now?" Jock was glad to return to simplicity. "Clearly he's running a worse muck than usual in something."

James said nothing ; he was almost breathless.

Joyce certainly looked curiously, spiritually lovely. Her face upturned to the old man's, a grave protest in her voice, dismay in her exquisite cloudy eyes. She might have sat for the picture of an angel of mercy who had paused to upbraid.

"Hullo, what's up!" said Jock, whistling softly.

"Oh, Lord! will his tongue never cease clacking," thought the tortured lover. "Elinor's wrong for once,"

he added, upon another glance. "He hasn't even begun to dream of her. This—this sort of thing raises the brute in you. I'd rather hanker after another man's blood than Jock's."

The distress of the lady, Jock was relieved to find, was entirely human and closely connected with the masterpiece of a pagan being murdered by the erudite Anthony, who was rolling off fluently, every quantity false, disjointed fragments of Cicero's ode to old age.

"There's tragedy for you!" said Jock, with an irreverent grin. James was 'beyond speech. He was digging his stick absently into a drift of frozen snow.

"You'll be paying for this presently, sir," said Jock, too anxious to relieve the tension of the mental situation and to ease Joyce's shoulders, which he noticed ached under the weight of the fine old English gentleman. "It isn't midsummer, you know."

Half absently, Anthony tightened his hold upon Joyce's retreating shoulder and murmured a rolling stave blissfully.

"Oh! you don't know what you lose, you young fellows," said he, as soon as he could wrench himself from the Past. "If I had wiped out my imagination with brutal science, where should I be now, I'd like to know?"

"Where, indeed?" said Jock. "Still you may temper the brutality of the thing with a pinch or so of Attic salt. Why even James in his time, I daresay, construed his Cicero. Had to, poor beggar, when he was swatting for his first."

"Mr. Coates' degrees," said Anthony, with immense toleration, "confer the highest credit upon his—his powers of application. I have a sincere respect for them."

"At the same time I fear you'll find that the tendency of science—or possibly the age—is to purge any remnant of Attic salt that may happen to lurk in an unfortunate fellow after the ordeal of a modern examination out of his suffering system for good and all.

"This thing," said the Squire, sublimely, "should be shed upon a man, as it were, and grow and increase in

him in the silence, not be bellowed forth into his ears in class-rooms or forced into him by a patent pump."

They were now all ambling along the broad, plane-tree avenue, steered thither by Jock's thoughtfulness.

"Is the modern Don, I'd like to ask you, anything more than a patent pump? Haven't I spent devastating evenings in his company? Why, if you ventured to offer any observation outside the province of wine, or foxes, they—they looked down their noses! God bless my soul! old Roden had the dam—ahem—gross impudence to deluge me with foxes—me! and the result of the Liverpool Cup! And if you tried to divert the conversation into topics usual with educated men, they fell to on their dinners as though you had been guilty of some act of bad taste—mentioned religion, for example, in a profane place."

The Squire smiled affably; he made it a rule to be especially punctilious in act and speech with the Chemical-Works-Man about.

"They keep their knowledge on tap for the sacred uses of the academy! The priests of Rome and the Bible all over again! Red tape and arrogance of office are rampant in the land; and no wonder, with the place alive with Radical monopolists—hem—and Conservative too, for the matter of that," said Anthony, with polite humility. "Scholarship, young men, doesn't consist in filling wind-bags with a glib patter of fact, take my word for it, or a string of quotations, however accurate. It's an essence, an aroma. When I think of my old tutor Broome, bless my soul, I can hear him now declaiming Homer for his class."

"I've heard of him," said James, with an unmoved countenance; "remarkable man!"

"He diffused an atmosphere," murmured Anthony.

"He did indeed," said Jock, generously, "and so did the undergrads of his time."

"Attic salt, indeed! imagination! Where will you find either?" Finding a hopeless blank upon each of the three faces he scanned for some intelligent answer to his enquiry, and leaning all his weight on Joyce's

shoulder, he fumbled with his free hand in his pocket, and finally produced a letter.

"Here's an invitation for the Thorpes to this dance that appears to be turning all your heads." This he said with some significance. "Lady Rawson asked if one of you would take it down and explain the delay in sending it. A most unfortunate circumstance, considering the sort of woman Mrs. Thorpe is. Lady Rawson is somewhat slow to grasp a new idea. I believe she's been mixing up Mrs. Thorpe with the last curate's wife, who differed little, save in the number of her children, from her predecessor, who had seven children, and died young."

"Curates would seem to have Conservative instincts, sir," said James, gravely.

"Oh! well, it's natural they should," said Anthony, excusingly, "considering their associations. But I'm provoked about this omission. It would never have occurred but for Lady Rawson's unfortunate habit of getting people mixed up in her mind. You'll have to put it right, Jock—explain it."

"What, her likeness to her less-gifted predecessors?"

Anthony pursed his lips, but not at the obvious levity in the remark. It was a breach in the rabbit fence which might lead to the destruction of the spring bulbs that had caught his attention. He plunged forthwith into gardening.

The frank arrogance in the whole thing, the insulting patronage, the suggestion of throwing open the door of this select heaven to the good looks of a woman, aroused to aching point every principle in Joyce, lulled to rest for the moment by the poisonous glamour of her surroundings.

The Squire, whose long pottering was bringing forth twinges of gout, leant more heavily upon her fatigued shoulder. She seemed to be weighed down by county, but so choked with wrath and words was she that she could say nothing. She looked at James for an inspiration, a condemnatory frown, an uplifting glance—anything. He was watching her—her! with a smile a deal more human than democratic.

She glanced around the Squire's broad back at his son, then she melted a little. A beloved passage rushed to her mind.

"All Conservatives are such from natural defects. They have been effeminated by position or nature. Born halt and blind through luxury of their parents, they can only, like invalids, act on the defensive!" Before breaking into speech she glanced at the Squire hurriedly, then back at Jock.

"Any one must allow," she thought, "that he's not altogether accountable for things." Upon that she lifted up her melodious voice.

"Then Mrs. Thorpe's invitation might have been forgotten altogether," she said, slowly, "if she had been plain, or if by chance the backs of her dresses had rucked up."

"My dear Miss Anstiss, I hope I did not even suggest such a thing. If the lady were all right——"

"Or had county connections?"

"Or had not," said the Squire, with dignity. "Lady Rawson may be obtuse in certain matters, but she is the most considerate of women. In any case, we all make it a rule to entertain the clergy. I may honestly say that I haven't been at a dinner party for twenty years that has not numbered a parson of one sort or another amongst the guests, and in most cases his wife."

Joyce flung a poignant glance upon the Archangel. The habitual gravity of his countenance was relaxed in an all-pervading grin.

"I'm so glad I came to stay amongst you," she faltered, flushing. "Now I know something about my father quite clearly that I only suspected before. I know that he is a man of the highest courage. When he married my mother he was a curate in an agricultural neighbourhood!"

The Squire's mouth opened, with astonishment, however, not words. Jock's lazy voice dropped softly into the pause.

"By Jove! yes, he was a curate who went to his bishop's dinner in slippers one day, and the next, at some

congress or other, with about a dozen sentences woke up the whole brooding cloud of divines and set the ball rolling finely, I can tell you—provided every great daily in the Kingdom with a leading article. If he'd been on the right side for the time being, he'd have been a bishop by now. There was a deal more genius than curate about Mr. Anstiss!"

Joyce's eyes flashed out at him like green opals; then they were grey again with pain.

"Was it Factory Town, then, that had prevented any repetition of those epoch-making utterances," she thought, miserably, "or could it be that he was still thinking them?" She wished she could have believed that he was!

"My dear little Miss Anstiss," said the Squire, soothingly, as though he addressed an excited filly, "I fear I have tired you."

Joyce was floundering through the streets of Barham, beating her way back through the dreadful fog to dine on stewed cod's livers, a loathsome compound recommended for the good of her father's liver complaint.

She did not hear the kindly enquiry. The Squire repeated it.

"I am tired," she confessed, honestly, back again amongst the plane-trees, "but it's not from your weight. Nothing in this place could tire me. It's all sauntering and rest and—and delight; it's poppy-land," she said with a slow, shy, uncertain laugh. But at least she had begun to laugh at last!

"I think I got tired thinking of a dreadful day and a dinner of cod's livers."

"Good Lord!" said the Squire, loosening his hold on her quivering shoulder.

Jock, shaking with soundless laughter, transferred the gaping gentleman bodily to his own arm, and hitched him on firmly.

James took possession of Miss Anstiss, and deliberately marched her off towards the lily ponds.

"Sometimes at Oxford when I was floating down on

a summer's day with the current I have felt as you felt just now," he said, fairly sick for the contrast.

"You! you couldn't feel as I do. You are different—your life—is different. You're a power; you're the backbone of the place; the corner-stone to the whole building. They all stand or fall with you. Being king of any kingdom alters everything. I daresay the Prince of Monaco has his moments of feeling royal! In all your life you never felt ineffectual."

"Oh! didn't I?"

"No—not in the way a vicar, crushed down with numbers, whose spirit is not the spirit of the place, might do. Mr. Hallowes is right. My father is a genius. No one ever said it before, so you don't quite know what it felt to hear some one else say out in words what I've hardly dared to think. Oh! he's a genius being blotted out. I've seen sermons he's written—old ones. He writes none now," she said, her lips trembling. "He goes for them to his old trunks. In the study they were beautiful—and—and—reasonable—and he, even in re-reading them, believed them and his eyes shone. But read from the pulpit in the foggy tired evening voice of the place—over there we all speak the same towards evening—the words were just words, and he was sure of nothing but that his congregation was snoring."

"But to have genius——"

"Isn't to be a genius. Oh! I know. But it's something! And, Mr. Coates, it's all very well, but you don't know what it is to have a liver. The genius that can hold out against a chronic liver would need to be made of iron. The life there and sickness weakens your hold on everything. The genius loses faith in itself, just as the faith does. It's horrible to watch genius losing faith in itself, but I—I think it's worse to watch faith losing its faith. Mr. Coates, did you ever see this?"

"Yes," he said, gently, "I did."

They walked slowly down an old rose walk, still heading for the white ponds.

"My mother simply couldn't stand it," said Joyce suddenly. "She went out of it almost before one had

time to look at her. She was like one of those Christmas roses we were looking at, white and cold and still and lovely out in the cold. I daresay that's what makes me have to speak of things. In all my whole life I've never spoken of my father and mother before." She paused suddenly and caught his arm. "Do you mind?"

"My dear—my dearest child! no. It's quite time you did speak of your father and mother."

"Even if you did mind, I believe I should have to speak now," she said, with an odd, white little smile. "There's something in this place that makes you resent—and—and protest. At Barham every one you met was in much the same strait—some worse, some better, but dulness and depression and repression everywhere, and you were too busy facing each minute as it came to protest. Then it never seemed as atrocious; it didn't make you fairly rage to see your father's soul dying in pieces and to know—that in the end, when all the light has gone out, his body will have to lie perhaps for years in the dark."

Suddenly she shivered, and in an odd little way seemed to fall together. "There, one didn't mind somehow; one was used to it; one could take things for granted, and just work as well as one could. Here—Oh! here has changed everything! It's all become so difficult, that if you can't help me, simply," she said, standing stock still to look at him, "simply, I really don't know what will become of me."

"I!"

"Oh! you—you! Yes! That night you made a hundred things clear. If you can't help, no one can!"

He was archangel now pure and simple, and with every nerve twittering, Joyce was saying her prayers aloud.

James set his face, and his thoughts whirled round in a cloud of sparks. "Go on, dear little girl; tell me anything you can," said he. "I'm older, at any rate. And I've got to the end of everything myself before now. This is your first experience. Oh! my poor little child!"

She stared, hardly understanding, but she went on; the congested words had to come out at last.

"Everything I see, or hear, or know here ought to be against my—principles." She paused by sheer reflex action on the damning word. "The monopoly of land is wrong; the sport is—economically wrong, besides being—cowardly brutality! The delicious, easy, good-humoured arrogance of the society here is wrong, more especially because, oh! it's enchanting and—and because, although it's beautifully covered up with grace and charm and a gloss of chivalry, deep down—it's—it's a little vulgar, I think."

James laughed grimly. "The idleness and extravagance and—and greediness. When they begin to lose interest in their figures, they sometimes—sometimes devour with enthralled eyes, you know."

She paused, looking askance at her audience.

"Don't apologise," said he, laughing; "remember it's only me."

"I—I don't exaggerate, do I?"

James' murmur was soothing, though indistinguishable. "Sit down here," he said. She plumped down obediently on a bench beside the lily ponds. Just above on a terrace two gorgeous leisurely peacocks had stepped out haughtily to stretch their ugly legs before they slept. Joyce turned her fascinated eyes upon the royal birds. She adored them, but they were typical of the whole of the scandalous high-handed monopoly of the best that was eating into the very heart of just balance. Her voice gathered confidence; her eyes severity.

"Even if I do exaggerate, Emerson, American or not, was far too conscientious to do so, wasn't he?" James' eyes although they were fixed upon her, burning steadily, relaxed in a twinkle. He wondered if the fearfully familiar words would be in any sort of way freshened by the pathos of her little mouth.

"Go on," he said, gently.

He reminded her of Thor, Heaven alone knew why! But she had given up trying to account for James.

"The whole principle is wrong," she sighed plaintively, "and so are—they. They are blind and halt in a way, and if one was to begin on the luxury—and the—other

things—of the parents, why, one would never cease. Oh! dear me! they're nice!—Oh! they're nice! They're most refreshing. But, oh! Mr. Coates—nothing is exaggerated—nothing!”

He was about to offer some banality calculated to calm, but she divined his purpose.

“Oh!” she cried out, staring and shrinking, “don't, for goodness sake, don't say ‘There's something rotten!’ Four men—fox-hunting men—said that to me the first week at my uncle's. They laugh at you so politely in this place. That's another thing! Sometimes you're not really quite sure that they have been laughing until you're just falling to sleep. Then—— Oh! you don't know! But *it is* all wrong, the—principle!”

“There are certainly some fundamental errors in the system,” stammered James.

What concerned him was the sensitive flushing of her cheeks. He could see the quick little tremour of the eyelid nearest to him. With these things going on in a girl, it was difficult to do justice to a somewhat comprehensive problem involving certain others equally perplexing. He might have said more and put it stronger, Joyce thought, but she had too much to get out in the time to be hypercritical.

“There certainly are!” she remarked, with faltering severity, “and when you yourself want—Oh! you know—guidance,” she said, her very chin pink. The jokes that Betty had hung upon this baleful word! “It's—it's so difficult to—to put things right. I daresay, perhaps they had reason to think”—she swallowed some queer little sound—“to think me idiotic.”

“They're sharp enough, these people. They don't put themselves out of their way to talk to idiots!”

“Oh! I'm new,” she assured him. “They fairly crave for newness.”

“I see.” His face baffled her.

“I'm not sure they're not right,” she sighed. “It alters your own opinion of yourself, this place. Once I used to think I was—if anything—ra-rather clever, you know. And most certainly I never thought myself

weak!" She paused and turned her whole face to him. I—I'll tell you something. I used to shudder at fox-hunting—I would, you know—naturally, and one day I was feeling the wrongness in—everything horribly, so I went out on my bicycle by myself, and suddenly—I don't really know how it happened, I found myself in the very thick of a fox hunt!—and—well!—it—it was glorious, magnificent!" Her voice rose, her eyes were opals. "It was heavenly! I could have shouted for joy!"

She flung one look at him and her eyes dropped. Had she known all that shone in his, they might haply have dropped lower.

"Odd that our experiences should be so much alike," said James, coolly. "That is exactly how I felt my first day with the hounds."

She lifted her head sharply. "You!" She searched his face for derision, but there was none.

"It's not always the right things that spur us to shouts of joy, of course; but after all hunting's clean and it's out of doors, and in one form or another it's in all our blood. A democrat to his eyes will see nothing for which to tear his hair in a rat hunt! Even from a purely theoretical point of view, it's hardly fair to condemn anything running rampant in the blood of any small nation that has made itself into a great one."

"Oh! dear!" she said, dejectedly. "Mr. Hallows didn't say those words certainly, quite different ones, but it amounted to the same thing."

"Oh! Mr. Hallows has been coaching you in this matter too, has he?" James' amiability seemed to be on the strain. She looked at him enquiringly. With restored generosity, he took up the thread again.

"Oh! well, Mr. Hallows and I both aim—when we think of it, to be more or less reasonable men. Besides, it was Mr. Hallows and the like of him who helped to sort out my notions. I was as rabid as you once." Joyce squirmed. "I was young too," he said, with extraordinary tenderness, bending till he brushed her shoulder, "and suffering from a close and intimate and uninterrupted view of the sufferings of great masses.

When I left school at eighteen, by way of discipline, I believe, my father kept me at home for five years at the works before I went to Oxford, and he didn't believe in holidays or visiting. I knew the boys at school, of course, but I had seen little of the home life of boys and men like—well—Jock Hallows. You can come pretty close to fellows at school," said James quietly, "but it's in the home life, the all-round life with women in it, that you really touch them, and get to understand a little of both sides. With the women of England what they are, you can't condemn wholesale anything that's gone to their making."

"I suppose not," said Joyce, sighing, "and things are growing more difficult every moment."

"Shall we walk and clear our brains?"

"I like being here better. I like to think of the lilies waiting for the summer under the ice."

"Like you," thought James, his heart thumping.

"I wish we could wipe out all the problems in an afternoon," he said.

"If only they didn't increase in an afternoon," she said, a sudden ring of impatience in her voice. "When—when I'm at Barham amongst them doing what I can—it isn't much—but," she said, sorrowfully, "I do—my very best—I do indeed—the poor people with their numbers and their monotony and their mountains of grief and their boiled eyes and their ghastly customs, oh! they take all the heart out of me! Ugliness is a terror to me! A factory chimney fairly makes me sick! I don't believe I am sorry at all. I never want to look at a poor person again!"

"Here—here"—her voice thrilled and melted—"here my whole heart is sorry for them. I—seem to be—panting to—to help them. I can't help the word!" She paused, and then on she rushed again.

"And there's another thing. There I can't see any God anywhere, or hear Him, or conceive the possibility of Him. Least of all in the church with—oh! you know—with the unearthed sermons! Here, when I look out of the window in the morning and see every-

thing ; when I go out into the garden and see the beds— I think that thinking of the flowers lying waiting under the kind brown earth is better almost than seeing them. It makes you think of—of—faith and hope and mothers—and—oh—I could sing psalms here all day ! In time I do think I could believe in God—and—and things, just as Mrs. Hallowes herself does ! Is religion,” she protested, desperately, “just a mere effect of the senses dependent upon—locality ? Is there no God better than those others, that depended on climate and made their divinity an excuse for their humanity ?”

The strange tenderness, the amazing pity in James' eyes terrified her into silence ; into a full consciousness of the extent of her outbreak. She gathered herself together and stood up with a good deal of dignity.

“I believe if I apologised,” she said steadily, “it would only make things worse ; but I want you to know that never in all my born days did I ever say so much—at—one time—and—and all about myself. I feel just awful ! But who had I to turn to but you ? We—we all expect so much from you. You are the—the leader we've been wanting. I'm not peculiar,” she cried ; “they all say it. When I look at you”—she looked steadily, her eyes beaming softly—“I can understand the uses of—a priest and a confessional. Roman Catholicism no longer surprises me, and stands no longer among the problems.” She folded her hands and continued her serene contemplation.

James' whole being gasped unobtrusively. He was in no condition to offer advice upon any conceivable subject, his imagination refused to work, he was absolutely helpless, absolutely defenceless. He was flung back violently upon the bed-rock of Nature, and Nature at the moment was too strong a force ; she had got beyond handling ; he was afraid of her. If he gave her her head, he knew what the jade would be at. She would be at his undoing, she'd be babbling out the whole truth, and love—love—love—whole worlds and hearts full of love would be emptied at the feet of a girl quite unprepared to accept it—in the right spirit.

Grown used to the habit of sanity, James wrenched it now to his rescue. He cleared his hot eyes—to the best of his ability—and looked. The extraordinary unconsciousness of self hanging upon the heels of the love of this sentimental person gave him strength to look at the girl without thinking of himself. And thus he was able to get at some of the things in the girl's heart.

He looked at her pure, sincere, distressed face, at her eyes piercing sorrowfully back into the murk and mire of her grim home. He saw the youth of the child spreading its quivering wings for flight; her eyes straining up through the darkness after the light; her twinkling light feet gripped hard by duty. Above all he saw the spirituality, inseparable in his reverent mind from the ultimate perfection of woman, shrinking back upon itself, scarred and seared from the burning in of the knowledge of unspeakable griefs, cowering and crushed under the blows of the hammer of fact which, notoriously lacking in discrimination, strikes with a pitiless disregard of the delicate unseasoned anvil upon which it beats. All this James saw, and for the second time in an unswerving life voluntarily he turned quietly back from his goal.

"It would be like making love to a girl while she's saying her prayers. It would hurt her hideously," he said, foolishly.

James' sentiment was bolstered up, however, with some practicality. "She can't always be saying her prayers," he added. All his hesitation, be it observed, his distress, his fears of crowning her with the wrong crown, swept to the winds.

It was now a mere matter of waiting. He could wait!

"Will you do something for me?" said James, touching her shoulder softly.

"Oh! anything!" She wondered if at last, at last any one single little atom of a prayer was about to be answered.

A girl may escape from a God, but the habit of praying has a calamitous way of dogging her footsteps and flouting her theories.

"You've promised rashly, and now you've got to promise with discretion. I want you not to bother about anything, anything whatsoever connected with Barham or your duty to it, until after the dance, or any problems."

Joyce's eyes flamed out with relief, but a minute after, at the pinch of duty, she winced, almost imperceptibly.

But James' eyes were equal to her.

"Your anything, mind, includes all I choose to demand. You mustn't think of poverty, of cause or effect, or groans, or smoke, or meetings, or any mortal thing connected with any social problem until after the dance. After that—after that I've a sort of prophetic conviction that you'll think differently of everything."

"Yes," she said, staring with great perplexed eyes.

"Say, 'S' help me!'"

Her eyes were like saucers. "S' help me," she whispered.

"And now, suppose we move on? It's January after all. What about the dancing?"

Joyce's eyes ceased to wonder; they flashed. "Ah! that's right!" said James, laughing. "I felt pretty sure Mrs. Hallows would see to that. You might tell me how you manage."

She hesitated, flushed, and then almost in spite of herself surrendered to his eyes. "It's a sort of a secret, but it doesn't matter really. An old French governess of Mrs. Hallows is teaching me, and Mrs. Hallows plays. Sometimes she dances, she dances like a fairy godmother, she—she taught herself," said Joyce, hurriedly, "in her room. Her aunt didn't approve of dancing, but she had other relatives who did, and she wanted to be ready for her first ball. It never came—something always happened. The one thing she used to want to do frantically was to dance, and never in all her life did she dance with any one but me!"

Joyce stopped suddenly and glanced nervously at the Archangel. He looked odd and extremely grave. The eagerness fled from her voice and face. "It's ridiculous, of course, I know," she faltered, apologetically. "She

was laughing all the time she told me. But somehow it makes me feel dreadful whenever I think of it. You wouldn't understand, of course. It's so trivial, I don't know why I told you."

The moisture which had only made her eyes bright, when she was telling her lame little story, had now burst out into two hot, round tears of mortification. "It's being here, I suppose," she said desperately. "It turns everything upside down. I've—I've—lost all sense of—of proportion—I think."

They were now facing the library windows, from one of which Anthony looked forth thoughtfully. Jock's cheerful whistle was rounding the corner. James was touched to the quick, but happily he had a practical turn.

"It's neither trivial nor ridiculous," he said, in a cool, kind voice. "It's about the saddest little story I've heard this long time, and instead of losing your sense of proportion, perhaps, after all, you're finding it."

"But—but—why! You're bringing all the problems back on me—like a load of bricks," said Joyce, with the little ghost of a smile, unconsciously quoting Jock.

CHAPTER XX.

It would no more have occurred to James Coates to pass Mrs. Thorpe's door without going in to see her than it would have done to pass Elinor Moore's.

Married, she seemed to him no less the dearest responsibility of his life than she had done as a girl.

Now, as always, she had a little shrine all to herself in James' life. And in a quite unobtrusive way he was honestly resolved to like Herbert Thorpe as much as, in the sheer nature of things, he ought to like Elinor's husband. Already he honoured and revered him as a saint. It was as a man that James was anxious to do Mr. Thorpe justice.

In her dreadful life of poverty, and fear and shame, he had learnt something of Elinor's methods, and now he knew more; and to think of her persistent, whole-hearted, faithful striving, week in and week out, in the grinding companionship of a faultless abstraction, made him feel cold clean into his marrow, just as he had felt when she had made serene jokes of her daily experiences—experiences which frequently sent him, a silent, impassive boy, out into the night to gnash his teeth for the sorrows of girls and the helplessness of boys.

The light whip of Elinor's pride had, in good sooth, been an excellent factor in the education of this rich young man. It taught him something of the delicate strength of the threads whereof is woven the armour of gentle-bred women, and many of the things that boy and man and riches can do, but more upon which they may not venture.

Through Elinor he learned his first lesson in humility and experienced the nerve-bracing stimulus of early defeat without any loss of honour. And for his part, in naïve unconsciousness, James drilled into Elinor's passionate heart the fine habit of self-control.

Where Elinor stood in his heart as distinct from his life, James had never paused to enquire. They had been comrades through sorrow, joy, terror, and a mighty crisis, and had grown so used to borrow each from each, in turns to lean and to support, that they belonged to one another "in a way," as James put it.

And the compact seemed as natural and simple and right as the sunshine or the showers. Every serving man or maid who ever came near Mrs. Thorpe began by approving of her, and intending to have a good time. She was "that taken up with things, she'd have an eye above corners, thanks be!" They ended invariably by fearing, respecting, and adoring her, harbouring, moreover, from henceforth an abiding and rancorous contempt for all shirkers. Unless, indeed, they were hopeless, when, in the habit of their kind, they disobeyed and detested.

The tea-poisoned, ill-fed farm lass whom she was now shaping into a decent parlour-maid when first James had appeared upon the scene, used to wonder, with a thrill of awe, how an atheist, used to handle dynamite, could be so civil-spoken and look so clean. For Cluff had been well reared in county traditions, and knew what a Factory Radical meant, bless you!

Having arrived by slow degrees at the conclusion that the mistress was reforming him, suddenly one day she beamed frankly upon their singular visitor.

Cluff's patient, interested inspection had by no means escaped Mr. Coates. Any subject of Elinor's methods always arrested his attention, and now this smile fixed it.

In the days of the strike, when he had been drinking his first draught of the bitter brew which only the People know how to prepare for apostles of their own blood and bone, he had learnt all about the evolution of that smile. It had been sown, and hoed, and watered by Elinor, and the sight of it blossoming, wan, upon haggard faces, used to refresh and revive the harried boy as a stray flower in a hungry desert may help a swooning traveller.

Oddly enough, remote as woman had lain from his

actual life, it was almost unconsciously always for women that James laboured and endured. When he had carried through single-handed, save for Elinor, the worst strike for ten years in those strike-cursed parts, James had been little more than a boy. It had happened during those years of probation imposed upon him by the last will and testament of James the elder. It was the one triumph of which he had been honestly proud, and it was not until this moment, until he again caught sight of Elinor in this well-known smile, with eyes grown older and a little wiser, that he knew really how little of the triumph was his, and how much Elinor's.

James was some time disposing of his hat and gloves, then he smiled round frankly at the girl; and the full sweetness of James' smile perhaps only Elinor and his own people really knew. It terrified Cluff.

"You're quite right, my girl," said James; "your mistress has done a deal more for me than ever she'll do for you. Because of course I wanted more done, being a Radical, you understand, and Factory at that; and in the end I daresay she'll turn me into something fairly decent. Not a Conservative Squire, of course; that's born, not made; but anything short of that. You ask your master to tell you all Mrs. Thorpe did in the great strike. He knows some of it, but I know more. Because, you see, it was for my people she did it. But the people themselves know most of all."

When she announced Mrs. Thorpe's visitor Cluff was puce, and there were tears in her brown eyes.

"Babes and sucklings again!" said James, dropping into his usual chair and forgetting to shake hands with his hostess. "Ever since I came to the house that girl's been watching me like a cat. She had got me mixed up in her mind with dynamite outrages and potting landlords and other eventful occupations. But latterly she's been revising her judgment, I've noticed, been weakening in the rigour of her condemnation, and to-day the climax came. She grinned a grin which informed me that from henceforth she'll be willing to trust me with her purse. And a girl who can forgive your upbringing

and condone your politics to that extent, won't stop short there. And of course it's you whose been working the oracle, as usual. I recognised the smile! And queer enough, cropping up here in this remote hamlet, it acted as a searchlight and told me a lot I ought to have the sense to know long ago."

Elinor was watching him eagerly, with flushing cheeks.

"Why didn't you tell me that you had a deal more to do with the squashing of that strike than ever I had myself. You know I'd have believed you, and your benevolence was misplaced, too. You can't think what an ass a man feels when he finds that sort of thing out—after the event. It's a brutal thing to know that you've been defrauding a woman of her just rights for a matter of four years, and that—if she'd been any one but you, she'd have been laughing up her sleeve at you all that time. Upon my word, I believe I'm thoroughly ashamed of myself."

"I don't believe you'd know how to be ashamed of yourself," said Elinor, with a little laugh.

"Don't you? I am, all the same. But never mind; I'm as proud as Lucifer of you! Of course, I always knew who was the source of the smiles. I knew who worked day and night amongst the women, and subdued the tiger in the poor, driven, clammed wretches. And I knew what the kindness of the women towards me did for me and for the men; how it saved the self-respect of scores of decent fellows, and prevented starvation and bloodshed, and worse. At the same time, until I stumbled again upon tokens of your handiwork in that relenting grin in the hall there, I really don't think I knew how much you did for me in the blackest days of my life."

Her flush had faded; her cheeks and forehead had regained the soft white peculiar to them. She sat a little more erect than usual, and her eyes shone radiantly. She was far too honest to depreciate either herself or her works. She knew that throughout all that dreadful time she had been literally inspired. She knew that four years younger by time, but by sorrow six years older,

she had plumbed to ultimates whilst James still dealt with symptoms; that she had already begun to work upwards whilst he was still wasting himself digging down. She knew that she had had a bigger hand in saving him and his than ever he himself had.

But because they had worked together with one mind and one heart, one brain almost, because of having been young together in their over-scrupulousness, their fears, their unspeakable horror in the face of the brutality of fact, their irrepressible, keen delight in the fierce humour and stimulation in the whirlpool of human passions in which they found themselves, the two had grown so much one a part of the other in James' mind, that any division of honours would have been next to impossible. So that James, who had a good deal of pure man about him, had scooped up the triumph and glory both richly deserved and honestly earned, and although he never really forgot Elinor's share in them, somehow it stood in neatly with his own, and together they completed a most admirable whole.

It all happened shortly after the death of Elinor's parents had broken in upon the intolerable desolate anguish of her own degradation and James' knowledge of it, when his kindness—rather too boyishly solicitous and nervous—was fast driving her mad.

It all came back to her now with a rush. The way of its happening had been so sudden, so swift and strong and inspiring, confused, dazed, horrified, weighed down with ineffectual conscience, in sheer cold despair she had gone down one day into the lanes amongst the women used to suffer and to sin to listen to their talk, to watch their faces, and had waked up one fine day to find hate rampant and ruin staring James in the face.

She saw it all before her now like a picture.

Then the blood of an old Christian martyr which had been at work within her, playing havoc with her conscience, of a sudden smelt righteous strife and let her sleep o' nights. And, smiling serene and with a burning heart, Elinor went forth and worked wonders.

For a minute or two she had watched James rather

restively walking up and down the room. Then she laughed happily.

"It's really been beastly mean!" said James.

"It's not been mean. How could you be mean? But you're rather mannish in your ways, you see! I'm glad all the same that you do know. At the time I didn't care whether you knew or not. I knew, and that was enough. And when the horrors didn't break one's heart, well of course it was delightful, wasn't it? But when the exhilaration of battle cools off, a touch of true appreciation comes in nicely! I used to keep hoping that you'd come to tell me those two years abroad——"

"Good God! what a brute I've been!"

"No, you haven't. We had got so used to giving and taking, we two, to borrowing each other's good points, that—that it was difficult to say where one began and the other ended. It's always been like that with us, more or less," she added, with a sudden dilation of her pupils.

"Oh, well! I know now!" said James.

"Will you tell Herbert?" she asked, suddenly. "He'd like it."

"Will he be as forgiving as you?"

"There's nothing to forgive. He'll know you better, that's all, and I shall be happier."

But James had got an odd shock.

"This room is arranged for walking to that window," he said, accusingly. "Does peace come so hard to you, dear," he added, more gently, "that you must keep looking out there for it? It seems so natural to your quiet face."

"You to talk!" she said, with a laugh. "Why, it's only sheer politeness and county air that will make you sheath your sword."

"You know I don't mean that. You may be as peaceful as a cow yourself, and yet scatter strife with a firm hand."

"Oh! You may. At least other people may, but you may not. You're a bundle of contradictions. You'd attain a deal quicker if you were to specialise and drop

comfortably into the paces prearranged for you by a kindly Providence. Are you going to this dance? But of course you are."

James started; it seemed such an extraordinary topic to bring forward. For days past his brain had been humming with the dance, his nerves throbbing, his heart bursting with tender, fearful thoughts of Joyce's first ball. But he was surprised at Elinor. He looked down at her. She was fingering a little note, and looking at the fire, and her eyes were dancing in an amazing way. He didn't understand her. Their moods, although legion, had never clashed; there had always been room in the road for both, and they rode gayly together always. He wondered if they could be growing apart.

"The dance! Oh, yes, I'm going," said James, with no great cheerfulness.

Then suddenly the idea got hold of him. He remembered her passion for dancing. He remembered her as he had once seen her. He saw her, moreover, far more vividly now than he had then.

"And you'll wear white shining stuff with something thin over it that looks like moonlight, won't you? You wore that once."

"Your mother gave it to me for the Major's ball."

"You could get another like it?"

"I could, but you see I'm not going."

"What! But you look as though you were going. You'd like to go?"

"Why do you ask? As if you didn't know," she said, with a surprising flash of wrath.

"Thorpe surely isn't so narrow."

"Herbert takes everything as simply as he does himself. He's the last person living to think evil. The thing would bore him, but he'd go with a clear conscience. As it happens, I don't think his face would suit that sort of thing in the very least."

"Good Hea——"

"It would be as much out of place in a ball-room as a Madonna or the head of Christ or of St. John. One somehow wouldn't mind Peter! I tried to get rid of

this feeling, I can tell you. I'd give my eyes to go. But I can't, so I've refused."

"What does Thorpe say?"

"He says nothing, for the very good reason that I didn't ask him. It hasn't occurred to him to reflect on this dance, and I haven't reminded him. That's how it is. And—James, do you hear? You're not to interfere. I don't want Herbert to bother himself because he thinks I'm disappointed. I just tell you as I would tell myself. One can't get out of old habits."

"I shouldn't have believed it of you, Elinor. You're doing penance."

"Have men no understanding at all? Did you ever catch me doing penance for anything? The truth is, you've never yet looked at Herbert with seeing eyes. You've just lumped him with other curates. You've never been tired in your life, you're too—chemical to be especially weighed down with earth. You couldn't understand either Herbert or his face. Wait till you're dog tired. Wait till you've begun to try things and they all fail you; you'll learn then that it's the children of this world who will stand by you. They'll never fail you! They may be fools, but they're simple anyway, and sincere, and they have single hearts."

James was watching her closely.

"I daresay," he said, with some humility. "I daresay you're right. You generally are. Only I wanted you to see—Joyce."

"But I wanted to see her, too," she said, lifting her quiet face to his. "I feel as though I had a right to be there—her beginning night. It's a wonderful night for a girl. I began at that Major's ball."

"It was damnable that you got interrupted!"

"Oh well, dear, she won't get interrupted. But I think I must have some little part in the launch of the good ship Joyce. James, do you think Mrs. Hallowes would let me come to help dress her?"

"Of course she would! If—if things happen, or even if they don't, I should like to know that you had dressed her."

"It's the first time you've gone out to track happiness on your own account. You've been too busy all the time, and you're smothered with the religious spirit as applied to women!" she exclaimed, with one of her sudden bursts of impatience. "Are you sure of your road? Are you even sure of your goal? Are you sure of any mortal thing? No man's instincts are much to boast of, but if he's a practical person, with his nose in a laboratory that holds everything in creation but a woman, a will-o'-the-wisp's the pole-star for surety to any instincts he may have about him. The idea you're worshipping isn't the least like the girl you love, fortunately, for the idea of a man in your state, with your training, would bore to death the man you'll be when you've found out about things a little. I wish to goodness, if your mind was set on this sort of thing, that you had begun on a coquette with no heart, but plenty of wit. She'd have made your dreams rational. Her memory would have helped you to a firmer grasp on things, and it would certainly have taken the veneer of meretricious religion off women for you once for all! A woman, let me tell you, isn't a mystical Holy of Holies. James, sometimes your face is like a child's First Reader! A single word of truth about women cuts you like a knife. Such ignorance is criminal. You're utterly unfit to be married. A woman is a woman—a human slight thing riddled with frailties. Just exactly like yourself, except for the difference in the nature of her perversities. A confused compact of good and evil, of Heaven and earth, calling urgently for forgiveness, and indulgence, and infinite mercy. And this minute the very thought of the woman you love ever needing forgiveness makes you cold. Oh! James! How aggravating you are!"

James watched her, grave and grateful; after all, he would have been just as anxious for her; and how could she possibly know Joyce?

"If it comes to pass, I know what I am doing."

"She doesn't understand you, of course—but then no one does quite understand you, but me." She paused, her eyes fixed on him. "But I wonder, oh! I wonder if

you love her—love her—love her—her herself?” she said, her eyes darkening and lightening.

“Some day you will cease to wonder.”

Elinor pulled herself back from a dream.

“I wonder if I shall? Then no one except you will be so glad.”

“And meanwhile you’ll help to dress her,” said James, with a low, absorbed laugh.

“Meanwhile—oh, yes, I’ll dress her.” Something in her voice struck him. He turned to look at her.

“However it goes,” he said, “it won’t be altogether right without you. Nothing could be. And it would have been fine to see you in that gown again!”

“I’ll wear it at your wedding, with a high neck!”

“Ah! well, I’ve got to look at Herbert then—with seeing eyes?”

“Oh, James, God bless you, dear, and her—if she’s worth it, if she’s the right one.”

“She’s the only one—and after all the world’s full of them, and I’ve plenty of time to choose!”

James went away very thoughtful, and hard by the church he met Herbert, his face shining.

James fetched up sharp and fairly stared at him, being honestly anxious to arrive at a just decision.

“She’s right again,” he sighed, as he marched on.

“The saintliness in the fellow is the genuine article, and would be out of place in a ball-room. I hope to God it won’t jar on the poor girl in time. Hang it all! why couldn’t she have been there to watch Joyce and be happy in that cloudy gown?”

CHAPTER XXI.

JOYCE had started that afternoon, discreetly set bolt upright, for lack of space, between the Squire and his wife. The dread of the minx lulled to peace by the presence of James the Deliverer, had again got hold of Anthony.

He had lately become aware of an unhealthy and purposeful absorption in the demeanour of his son, and he knew the men of his house. For years they might slip equably along, taking women in a reasonable spirit as necessary and pleasant incidents in life, like any of the other thousand and one graceful adjuncts of a stable civilisation. And then in some irresponsible pause, for no quite apparent reason, of a sudden she would become woman and run through him like a live flame.

He looked at Joyce, and all at once the impression of James, built up in him carefully by Cecilia's anxious tremours, concealed in wise speech, vanished like smoke. What was a Radical manufacturer after all, with Jock about?

He continued his inspection. A light, of which he thought very poorly, since it rivetted his own chastened attention, was newly a-flicker in the deceptive minx's eyes. She reeked of artful innocence!

Beneath the crescent of her russet fur hat, her face gleamed soft as an oval pearl flushed with the sunset.

"Possibly," he admitted, with a doubtful glance, "she's not responsible for his presence. An unfortunate girl can't help her sex. Be that as it may, the devil is abroad!"

A misty confusion of quotations, illustrative of Woman the Destroyer, swept into Anthony's receptive brain, though vagrant, to be dispersed later in much the same fashion, in precisely the same spirit in which his ancestors warded off witchcraft with charms.

Meanwhile he turned seriously to Miss Anstiss and fell to on a discourse concerning the saving and illuminating influence of an odd-well-bred woman or so upon the seething, turbid caldron of Radical politics.

Joyce wanted to be silent to look at the western skies flooded with a rose-red of an incredible purity, as though the red hearts of the roses of all the ages were reflected back upon it. A delicate sweep of arabesques was etched out on the rose by the lace-like branches of the silver birches on the hill crest, the pale opal-tinted dome of the sky rose about the whole quiet scene like a benediction. The smoke from a score of houses, shrugged up snugly in their sheltered nooks, shot up straight in the clear air, jewelled all with sparks from the stirring of waiting housewives. The shy young sickle of a moon hovered white over the oak-wood; a hubbub of quiet sound hummed softly in the air. Everything thrilled with the sense of home and the warm hearth.

Joyce was too new to the fullness of beauty to attend to argument. With prim docility she uttered perfunctory "Yeses" or "Nos" and looked and listened breathlessly, but not to the Squire.

Presently, however, her ear was caught; she shook her head to clear her senses; then bent them amazed upon her instructor, who, in the spell of the moment, had forgotten his rôle of impersonal philosopher, and was judging matters from his own peculiar point of view.

"Gad!" he sadly observed, "the only hope for the party is to pull itself up out of the mud by the petticoats of women, and take my word for it, that's what they're after. Which of 'em said that you should hitch your wheelbarrow—if I recollect aright—to a star? It's the same principle throughout."

Cecilia, who could only catch fragments of the amiable preamble, could yet perceive a jarring note somewhere. She flicked her ponies and chirrupped; this was Mrs. Hallowes' nearest approach to a whipping-up.

"But I don't understand you," said Joyce, unsmiling.

"My meaning's surely plain enough." It always sur-

prised the Squire to observe the slender interest taken by young women in vital questions.

"I contend, that in spite of appearances, the longer you live the more tricky do you find the apparently obvious. There's some sound philosophy—when one considers it fairly, in this modern mixture of classes. But we need a bridge!—and woman—woman," he repeated, sorrowfully, after a fateful pause, "seems to be the only available bridge." Joyce's faint exclamation passed unheeded.

"A man who has earned the right to surround himself with the best of everything won't be content with the second best in the shape of the woman he'll choose for a wife. One can't blame the fellow. It's natural enough that he'll be wanting to marry into a decent family. You may call it snobbery, if you like," said the Squire, with artful generosity, "but it's more than that. It's the greed for recognition implanted in those of us to whose lot it does not fall naturally. A man like that, you see, would sweat his soul out to gain the good-will of his betters. And a wife's an admirable middleman, so to speak. He feels, moreover, that he deserves her as much as he does his fine house and his furniture—and his horses. No one knows how he bucketted up that hill that—hem!—everybody else was born on. Looked at from his point of view, there's been a deal of glory in the ascent, and it has, no doubt, called for considerable grit. Pity it's left the poor beggar so self-conscious and his own most ardent admirer!"

"It may be a pity," said Joyce, sharply, "but it's natural. If a man doesn't understand something of his own value, he must be an idiot."

"Softly, softly, my dear child! I speak impersonally. Thank God, I have been too long amongst the Immortals——"

"Poor Immortals!" she groaned, inaudibly.

"To be intolerant upon any point in regard to this damn—hem!—unutterable modernity. Why, I'd go farther than you and contend that no self-made man could by any possible chance be an idiot! That was the word,

dear child, wasn't it? It's not the fools who'll rake in the shekels, I can tell you. And what, after all, is a knave without an intellect, but a fool?"

Joyce's sense of humour could well have fitted in a nutshell, but here she smiled.

"And after his confounded grind upwards," pursued Anthony, magnanimously, "if a millionaire at thirty is still cheerful and—modest, he's an aristocrat by sheer force of nature. Even if he's not, though, he'll know what he's about, and he'll start to found a family as carefully and shrewdly as he would a factory or—or—works, and much in the same way. He'll take precious good care that his foundation is sure; he'll see to it that the blood that flows in his children's veins is all right, or as right as he can make it, anyway."

"You're anxious to do him every justice," murmured Joyce.

Her face reminded Anthony that he was perhaps generalising; he switched himself back on his original track.

"A girl who marries a man of wealth, a great employer—looked at from the purely Christian point of view, what's birth, after all?" said Anthony, with magnanimity, but a wry face. "Just look at the Apostles! Such a woman, I say, has a great future before her. She may become a political power, run a salon, be a philanthropist and sit on Boards; be a reformer—even a—a sort of Queen—in her own circle. Why, it's a prospect that fires the imagination! Eh, Miss Joyce?"

"It does indeed," she murmured, indistinctly.

Anthony when engaged in argument had a way of swaying to and forth dramatically. Joyce felt smothered in overcoat.

"You're extraordinarily lenient to Radical aggression," she gasped, desperately.

The Squire felt inclined to say "sho," and pat her. But he had a duty to perform.

"My dear little girl," he said, indulgently, "we must try to take a fair view of any fact, however repugnant to our natural instincts it may happen to be. There's no bilking fact; we must recognise it and face it honestly.

The abolition of the cloister struck a serious blow at the roots of the class to which—hem!”—he eyed her askew—“*we* belong. But since that’s all dead and buried, I cannot but recognise in the Radical millionaire a noble and—hem!—delicate mission, for woman, with her purity of vision, her exquisite tact, her itch for the reformation of man, the transformation of monsters, her inborn religious feeling, rightly directed, Radicalism in her hands may—in time—work wonders. She may even to some extent strip it of its irritating vulgar haste and be instrumental in directing the energies and damn—hem!—surprising power of oratory that distinguish its members into creditable channels. Eventually we might be privileged,” said Anthony, blandly, “to work side by side.”

“We’d make but a sorry pair,” she snapped.

“Not at all,” said Anthony, encouragingly. “Hopeth all things, believeth all things; that’s the spirit that will move mountains.”

“The mountains of Conservatism might be rather much, even for faith!”

“Ha! I was thinking rather of—the more recent growth.”

Joyce primmed her lips hopelessly and looked sadly at the fluffy wisps of cloud now taking eager, nervous little runs after the vanished sun. She longed for Jock with his infectious laugh; then with an unaccountable little flicker of guilt she longed for James, serious, purposeful, stable!

The Squire, feeling heated in spite of the nips of frost in air and earth and sky, was fluttering his crimson silk handkerchief airily.

“We’re all egoists,” said he, presently, with bewildering agility. “Sooner or later we all return to the pinch of our own shoe. I believe, firmly and conscientiously, that from one point of view, this rifling of our homes in the matter of daughters may tend to good. Anything that can extend the sphere of influence of woman—you’ll be with me here, I feel sure—and to the spread of—refinement must be to the ultimate advantage of the nation. But when it comes to our sons, it’s another

story altogether. It's more especially there that the dreadful necessity comes home to us. You see, in the state of genteel poverty to which your party, my dear Miss Anstiss, has reduced us, what's a man to do? The girls of his own class are—angels—no doubt, but just as surely, with an exception or so—are they paupers! His every instinct forbids him to—to make this sort of thing permanent. . .” Anthony's tone froze with impersonality. “The woman that any son of ours can marry must be delicately nurtured and carefully served. In every detail of life must she be lifted above the ruck. And, good Lord!” groaned Anthony, “it's the details that cost. A boy's sense of justice; his kindness of heart; his chivalry; his patriotism, in his disastrous financial condition, all forbid the mating of like to like. You can't do justice to a woman, a woman who counts nowadays on Land! So what's left for the lad to do? Why, he must go forth to spoil the Egyptians, that's all!” groaned Anthony. “The Radicals have swept everything from him save his home and his pride. He must, if he is to retain either, in sheer desperation, failing Americans, sweep in their daughters, and exchange barren blood and lean acres for fruitful money.”

Joyce lifted up her head like a queen. With a mighty effort she screwed herself round in her mass of wraps and looked her mentor in the eyes.

“It is indeed a dreadful necessity,” she observed, sublimely. “Fortunately, Mr. Jock Hallows has been delivered from this particular pit of destruction. There is always my cousin Betty at hand. An unexceptionable combination of all the—the requirements.”

This was an unexpected bombshell. Before the Squire had time to recover from it, in response to a shout from Jock, Cecilia had pulled up sharp.

The three faces that confronted him called for no explanation, and Jock always put action before argument.

“Come, Miss Anstiss,” said he, “I've been looking out for you. They're trying the new lights in the church, and it's just the time to see the west wing!”

The Squire threw a helpless note of appeal at his wife.

But she was sternly aware that he had again been putting his foot in it. She was inexorable. These things were best left to her. Besides, she was admiring the fine sprint of spirit in Joyce. And the royal command in Jock's demeanour set forth the beauty of a young man bravely.

Nothing would ever teach Mrs. Hallowes to be a true mother until after the event. Her sympathies were too undisciplined.

Joyce likewise had already arisen in her wrath, and was even now scrambling forth from her rugs.

There was drama in the uneventful air, and it must work itself out dramatically.

"I'm afraid you're shockingly cramped, dear," said Cecilia, the incorrigible. "You'll be glad of a change. We'll call for you on our way back."

"Wouldn't you rather walk?" said Jock.

"Much rather!" said she, with proud decision and an unbending head.

"Don't bother to call, then. We'll walk," said Jock, cheerfully, swinging off with his prize.

"Matters were getting serious, weren't they?" said he, sympathetically, but grinning.

Joyce's startling spring from shrinking, dim uncertainty into well-defined, proud defiance, tickled him hugely.

And yet there had been a vague enchantment in the aloofness of Joyce. As an ideal of an unfamiliar type she had been very arresting. With a queer pang of regret, in spite of his mirth, Jock watched the ominous flutter at the edges of her exquisite wrappings of cloud.

"I have just been instructed as to my exact significance in—in county politics," said Joyce, her head like a statue, her eyes bright with scorn. "It hadn't struck me before that I had any. I thought I was just an onlooker at the game. I was getting used to that. I didn't mind it very much. Now I find there's a use—a quite definite use for me—and the like of me, the irritating little offshoots of things they can't plump into a nunnery. Oh!" she replied, in response to Jock's

amazed gaze, "he said it almost in those words. But since we can't be nuns, we're to be—bridges!—between the classes. Each of us is to bear the weight of a Radical—a Radical husband across the great gulf of separation. And in time—and oh! with—guidance, we may leaven the—the poisonous mass of radicalism to such an extent that one—one glorious day—when we've each—transformed a—a monster. Oh! he said it—we may even be permitted to drive the luggage cart for the Conservative family coach."

She had been looking straight ahead at a flaunting church spire and a pitiless Heaven, but now she looked at Jock, and beheld a man, a creature like herself, terribly near, yet worlds apart.

At the same moment Jock, in the irresponsible way of his tribe, recognised in a flash that here was a woman! Joyce tingled from head to foot, and her cheeks were scarlet. Jock threw back to a trick of his boyhood. He trailed his cane along the irresponsive fence, then prodded in and out zealously after sheltering birds.

Having worked his terrier into a frenzy of expectation, he glanced nervously at the pearly profile by his side.

"Some girls would be rather pleased at this masterly scheme for their disposal," he ventured. "It would show, anyway, that they're a bit afraid of you. Personally I should prefer to be an enemy in the gates to a cipher."

"I haven't the least desire to be a—a daughter of Heth. Betty gave me a book full of her, and her manners, and customs."

"Hang it all! That was beastly unfair of Betty." His voice and face suddenly melted her towards Betty.

She broke in swiftly.

"I don't believe she meant it. If I had been any one else, it wouldn't have mattered. If I had been one of you—I should have laughed. It must be perfectly delightful to be able to laugh about things." Her eyes searched his face eagerly.

"You would, only you're like Lamb's friend, 'who had a perpetual apprehension of not doing what was right.'

Do you know what happened to him? The poor beggar—a good chap and a genius of sorts—died at 33!”

“I’ll not die. But I’ll get duller!”

“No——”

“Don’t protest,” said Joyce, staring wide-eyed at a hundred new points of view. If I could laugh—if I could put things as you all do—I could have pierced every one of your hearts with the things; I could have told you of the people there, and have made you laugh at them all the time, and remember. Instead of that, I’ve made you laugh at *me* and forget. But one gets grey in one’s heart there, and tells things greyly. Why, when one’s very laugh is grey, what can you expect?”

“Grey or red, it’s sincere, and it’s swift. No one wants more than that. And do you know you’re the sweetest, sincerest, truest girl I have ever known, and far the best.”

He spoke in a tone that he had never in all his born days ever imagined himself as boring a woman with. The two were aware of this simultaneously, but with a difference. In the same breath, they turned and stared blankly in each other’s amazed, expectant, shy young faces.

And a rush of foolish words, which yet held the whole of wisdom, were coursing up Jock’s throat.

A shrill shout, however, and two purple, chilblained hands seizing urgent hold of his coat froze their genial current, and Jock and Joyce instinctively shrank back into themselves, cold and shocked, and yet with humming pulses.

“Mary’s fair burnt to death! an’ the currick’s badly!”

They were chary of words in these parts. A backward shoot of the thumb completed the intelligence.

“Young Button,” said Jock, mechanically straightening out his rumpled coat. “Something’s up worse than usual. Most unlucky family in the village.”

Jock was in thoroughly sound condition. The sweet, tender bewilderment of the preceding five minutes was now safe in some secret soft recess of his brain—for future use—and he, practical landowner again, full to the brim of Buttons.

But Joyce was crouching against the church-yard fence, wide-eyed, white and trembling.

"Hang it all! What a start you've got. Do you mind it like this? You've seen so much pain," cried this embarrassing boy, seizing her hands. She pushed them away and stiffened her bowed back. Because of the greatness and terror of that which was astir within her, Joyce was afraid of everything; she was afraid of the man; she was afraid of herself; she was afraid of the sound of her own voice; so she spoke softly.

"I'm not afraid of pain," said she, "but I can't get used to it. Suppose we run?"

Without a word he caught her hand again—she suffered him to hold it this time—and they ran together, in the vague dusk, across the broad church walk, in and out of the paths that wound amidst the tombs. Little hot and cold thrills were running up and down through every inch of Joyce. For not for one instant could she free her thoughts of that rare five minutes which had stripped some of the scales from off her eyes. For Jock, now absorbed in Buttons, the enchanted minutes were already a vague delicious accessory. When suddenly one big overbearing thrill broke in upon him shatteringly. Then he fetched up in the race, stooped down over her, laughed softly for no apparent reason, and buried her little soft hands in both his big hard ones.

Joyce knew no more until she found herself, dazed and afraid, watching Elinor Thorpe, grave and beautiful, holding the little quivering burnt Button in her arms.

James, who upon the news of the accident had come with her, had gone for the doctor. So Joyce, when she had gathered in her senses and fallen into her place, had an opportunity of observing the way of an heredity idler with his serfs.

It was a little clean cottage interior, the warm firelight flickering soft upon the sordid want of the place; and in the corner the gin-soaked, dulled face of a farm-labourer peered out of the gloom, stirred now to a brief life by fear and a sullen, shamefaced shame.

It was the old story. In making for his wife, with a

view to punching her head, he had upset a lamp filled with low flash lamp oil, and the child had received the brunt of the explosion.

It was a cheap little oleograph stamped stark upon Joyce's brain. Change brick-cheeked labourer for livid-cheeked artisan, the mellowed orange of thatch for the raw purple of slate. It was domestic history told a thousand times yearly throughout the length and breadth of our pleasant land. Save only in one point. The wife was the same in all of the patient ass tribe; Conservative in face and feature, in belief and hopelessness. Above all, in the cut of her bodice and the inward tread of her weary feet.

The little point of difference lay in the fact of the poor creature's carefully dusting chairs for her visitors before ever she burst forth with her own griefs.

Here was the fatal serf spirit with a vengeance!

The sheer force of reflex action threw a veil for Joyce over those ravishing minutes. It broke the spell of her exaltation; it lifted her above feelings; she could again criticise feebly.

She threw a most extraordinary little glance at Jock, and turned with some confidence to offer help to Elinor. But after one second's watching of Mrs. Thorpe, she hesitated, flushed up red, then faltered out shyly:

"Please tell me what I'm to do?"

Elinor looked up quickly from her quiet labours. And absolutely against her will, her heart went out with an odd jerk to the little girl whom James loved.

In her affection for the human race, Elinor generally left out young girls. After all, they were only human things in the making. They irritated her. There was more scaffolding than structure about them. They blocked the view. They got on her nerves; and then sent her back, not forward; they made things harder.

But the waiting, half-shy, half-eager attitude of hand-maid in Joyce, disarmed her in the oddest way.

Here precisely was what she wanted, quiet helpfulness, docility, surrender, obedience. Elinor's requirements were frequently of a mannish nature.

"Ah! that's right," she said, brightly. "Now we'll do, even if the doctor's at the other end of the world! Mr. Hallowes is pumping up water! Oh! the time it takes! Make up the fire and get the kettle, and a saucepan—sure to be one about somewhere in that corner; and rout out the washing tub, and rig up a screen. And then, Oh! will you quiet the wailing, and keep the children out?"

It was harrowing and difficult work. The charred rags clung tight to the charred flesh, and pretty well half the body and limbs were burnt; and it all fell to Elinor to do, for the doctor was five miles out, and James, in the grocer's cart, in hot pursuit of him.

There was a serene perfection about Elinor's methods, a composure and foresight that no woman save a born leader of the people, and one who loved them well, could ever have attained. In an inexplicable sort of way she reminded Jock of some brooding divinity.

The divine touch, save in the one woman whom his own love has made divine, is discomposing to absolute man; it keeps his mind on the strain.

While he obeyed Elinor's every command rigourously, and fetched and carried diligently, Jock experienced a gentle joy in contemplating Joyce's sweet new wistfulness, her unobtrusive helpfulness, her great wide eyes, her quick breaths, her quiet courage in the horrid strife with pain, but also her quiet thrills.

She did not attain to Mrs. Thorpe's heights, perhaps. Even he was in a condition to allow that. But men of Jock's temper, when once their mind is set this way, find it easier to love than to marvel.

When James came in without the doctor—always a man hard to track—but with an armful of all the right things, his eyes melted at the sight of Joyce, but they rested marvelling upon Elinor, and his heart leapt up in his mouth, for he had recovered the lost Elinor, the perfect woman of his youth. And in that moment her fall and his condemnation were swept forever out of his life.

It was the quiet assurance in her eyes, the leisurely

brooding perfection in her movements that terrified Jock, and humbled Joyce, which inspired James.

He had known those eyes when they were as passionate as her heart, as wistful and as full of striving as little Joyce's.

He had known the quick, impulsive turbulence of her movements. In her passion to help, he had known her to hurt writhing creatures. Because of her undisciplined zeal he had known her brain to fail and her hand to tremble at the crucial moment.

In those days the very size of her heart, the ardency of her nature, had always been in Elinor's way. And then she had invariably followed, but now she led.

"God! What she must have suffered before she could reach this sovereign calm. It's certainly something in this suffering world to see some visible beauty as the first fruits of pain."

The next mental impulse of James, was to register a firm resolve to keep this rare and exquisite beautifier as far away as possible from those other eyes that had not yet so much as started in pursuit of peace.

This paradox completed in his own mind, James proceeded to do the few things left undone by Jock.

When the child was soothed at last to sleep, and the mother sufficiently rational to grasp what she had to do until the night, when Elinor would come again—for the little creature was too ill to be trusted through the dangers of the dark to so hopeless a mother—the two girls went out together and stood silent in the flame-lit dusk. Some distance away Jock was giving the father some wholesome counsel, yet soothing down the natural austerity of the village policeman, after a fashion that struck Joyce even at this moment with a pang as feudal, while James, regardless of principle, was ordering in beef from the butcher's shop for the sad-faced mother.

The girls were alone and strangely close together. They had been standing in that hour each before the judgment seat of the other, and each in her kind was generous. One through the limits of her youth and inexperience striving unconsciously after that most excellent

thing; the other limitless because of sorrow and of sin, having gained it through blood and sweat, consciously.

"I know now," said Joyce, the pink reflection of a flame upon her cheek, "I know now just how useless I am."

Elinor's face—she was taller by a head—gleamed white in the starlight.

"And I know now," said she, mimicking, "just how useful you are. And I'm no longer surprised at—anything!"

Seeing nothing but her point of view, Joyce, in her persistent eager way, hurried on.

"You were—wonderful!"

"And you were a little human girl; that's far better; not a mere vitalised conscience! Don't go back to that attitude, mind!"

But Joyce took no notice of her.

"I never saw a religious picture before that I altogether believed in. You looked—just as one who believes these things," she interposed, flushing, "might think of the mother of Christ."

Suddenly Elinor was eager, too, as eager as Joyce. She caught hold of her sleeve.

"You mean that I looked like a Madonna, in whom a little half-opened bud of a thing, like you, could believe? Do you mean that?"

"Yes," said Joyce, staring.

"Then it's true! You wouldn't idealise me," she said, half aloud. "I'm glad; I like doing things for any one that's hurt;" she explained, upon an odd impulse. "When I'm doing it, I feel a thousand times better than I am. And I'm glad I look it. If you look it, you'll be it in time! I want to be a power; and so it would never do to look or be, you know, exactly—well—like a curate's wife!"

"Oh!" said Joyce, coldly.

Elinor laughed, seized her shoulder and fairly shook it.

"There! you are disapproving again," she said, her hand still on the astonished shoulder. "I have a sound

reason for this. Can you never either trust or tolerate what you can't understand? Why, you don't understand James Coates!" Joyce winced sharply. "You don't even understand that splendid young Jock Hallows!" Joyce's sudden tremble fetched Elinor up. "However, when one thinks of it, I'm disapproving myself now, and without altogether understanding," she said, slowly.

That the girl should wince when the name of the first man was rapped out at her accusingly was natural enough, but what would she be at quivering at the mention of the second? Elinor wondered sharply, then hurried upon her own tack.

"However, since I want you to do something for me, we won't quarrel. Come on out of the light. It's blinding, don't you think? and it's cold standing here. We'll come back when we hear the doctor's cart. Now listen. Some day when you know my husband better, will you tell him just exactly what you told me a moment ago?" Joyce started. "Oh! you think me vain and greedy of praise. Well, so I am. I have reasons and incentives. It's like a tonic to my husband to hear me praised, and my husband is a saint. There was never yet a saint who wouldn't have been the better for a tonic, especially if he's eventually to be a bishop, and that's what I mean Herbert to be. A saint, a mediæval saint, would look very well on the Bench, don't you see, and would be a novelty. Men would go away and carry his face with them like a prayer in their hearts; and even women would be surprised into a reverence absolutely impersonal. And I don't intend that this effect shall in any sort of way be weakened by me. Think of a man like that having a scrub for a wife! You're a free-thinker, aren't you?" Joyce lifted her head. This—this was holy ground. "I went through the phase myself," said Elinor, serenely, with a dreaming smile. "How young I was then, and how obstinate and vindictive, and innocent. I think I was almost as delightful as you are now. But even now, in your present state, teeming with progress and negation, you couldn't look at Herbert without feeling that you weren't very far from Christ, and that

Christ was very near God. Herbert has known many an emancipated Factory Radical before this, and sent him away thoughtful." Elinor paused and stooped to look at her. "But perhaps you're rather young yet," she said, indulgently. "The grim, sad men of whom I speak had seen and suffered; they knew how long life can be, and how lofty. It's sometimes the part of sorrow and sin to make us lift up our eyes to the hills; it's never by any chance that of youth and innocence; and, oddly enough, frequently the eyes of the righteous stop short at the foothills. But, oh! you poor little Joyce, you're hating me!"

"I? Oh!"

"You are, and you mustn't. You'll be astonished to hear it, but some day you may possibly have to love me, and meanwhile we must be friends. Look up! I want to tell you something."

In spite of herself, Joyce looked up, and the strong sad face held her bound.

"I had the oddest education, and although it began so young that it left me no youth at all really, everything in it worth considering happened in an hour, in one little hour in a winter's dusk. When I found that just as I had succeeded triumphantly in crushing every atom of ideality out of myself in—about the most brutal way a woman can—I found that for years I had been the ideal of the biggest and best man I had ever known."

"But—but didn't you know you were?"

"I didn't—I thought all the time that he had only been pitying me. We were lonely together, and he was full of a queer sort of pity. If I had known, I should have understood how precious and fine I was, and I should have guarded myself accordingly."

The glamour of this mystery was seizing upon Joyce, and Elinor's face bewildered and excited her.

"Oh! I wish you'd known."

"I wish I had. But I didn't. He hardly knew himself; he was quiet and grim and afraid of ideals, and shy in the face of his own thoughts, and he found it hard to say the things he felt, and he never looked them.

Besides, the things were too vague in him for words! I didn't know that I might have had what I wanted most in the whole wide world until the day after I'd lost it."

"But didn't he——"

"Men as young as that don't come back to broken ideals, I knew, however, when I'd gathered up my wits again, that altogether it isn't in man—at that age—to brook broken idols; it's in woman to build herself up, by the light of a man's conception of her, into the reality of it. To incarnate his dream," she said, with a low laugh, "you can always be as good as a man thinks you, with a point or two of difference in the goodness, that's all, and it's only you who can instruct him upon these subtle points. And no matter what any one tells you, you must believe this. You must believe that even if you're not as good as the best man thinks you at the present moment, you can be in the future, and that's what you're to aim at; and under no circumstance must you waste your time by being the ideal of a second-best person. If you do, you'll end by being a drudge; for that's just what the ideal of an inferior man means. And so this is another reason why I'm building and building, and oh! the labour of sifting sand! But some day I mean to reach the level of that old dead dream. And although of course he will be none the wiser, Herbert will be, and I will be myself, and all the people amongst whom I live will also be—in a vague way, of course."

"But why shouldn't he know, too?"

"He'll have another ideal by that time. A good deal more beautiful, and pure, and sweet, than the first; although perhaps a little less heroic. Because he'll be older himself and less drawn to the elemental virtues."

"But I don't understand you——"

"Oh, I! In the man's mind, although I shall be all built up again by then, without a flaw that counts, in that man's mind I shall be a mended plate; of rare china indeed, and precious, but mended. And this man likes priceless, unflawed porcelain; and he's worth it."

"I wonder—I wonder if he'll get it?" said Joyce, breathlessly.

"I hope he will—I think so. Perhaps some day I may help him to tend the fires when the exquisite vessel that he will choose is being baked. The beauty of the best porcelain depends always on the baking, on the faithfulness and skill of the servant who watches the oven."

"Oh! It isn't fair," said Joyce, her imagination all aflame.

"It's quite fair. There was a bad flaw in the baking of the original plate—else it wouldn't have smashed. And now I've made you a great confidence, half of which you don't understand. But that doesn't matter. We're going to be friends. I shall never speak in this blatant way of myself again, so that needn't put you off. Speak up, little Joyce. Are we to be friends, then?"

"Oh! But what can I say—to such a woman?"

"But why?"

"But you're so wonderful."

"But I'm not in the least; it's about the last thing I am. I'm coming to help Mrs. Hallowes dress you for your first party, and then you'll find me out. I'm just a woman—a girl—I'm only twenty-five after all—and I'm full up to the chin of vanities. Look at the way I do my hair?"

"Why—why are you good to me like this? It isn't—for myself altogether!" Joyce peered up in her face eagerly.

"For a sort of fellow-feeling. You're the ideal of a man, too. Of a man who is big and good and more like and unlike the man I knew than any one I have since met. And also he was my dearest friend till Herbert came."

Joyce flushed scarlet, and that ravishing five minutes beside the church-yard wall swept back upon her. She felt as though tossed in drowning waters.

"I—I'm not you," she said, at last. "I have so little power."

"There are so many powers; there's an elephant for example, and a steam engine," said Elinor, with a little laugh, "and a rose in a garden. The power of a rose in

a garden is a wonder ! And here we are back again—and there's the doctor's cart, and now the woman will be in a condition to dilate, she'll like to tell it all herself. Come here into the shadow," whispered Elinor. "One of the secrets of a curate's wife who means to rise, is to know when to keep out of the way."

Joyce's eyes were fixed a little wildly on the group of men. She was hot and cold with a new doubt, a new anxiety.

The two men side by side, and so close to her she could almost touch them, swung the puzzle new-born in her brain to a swift maturity. She throbbed with the fulness of a new life ; a new confusion thrilled every atom of her. Not knowing in the least what she did, she seized Elinor's arm.

"I wish I knew," she whispered, so soft that the other's wits just snatched the words which escaped her ears, "I wish, Oh ! I wish I knew."

Elinor glanced at James, then at the girl, and for a second she could scarce believe her senses.

"Wobbling !" she thought, at last. "Dear God ! and with a man like that in the balance." She laughed shortly, with a strangely altered face.

"You understand whist, don't you ?" said she, with a little hiss. "When you're in doubt, lead trumps !"

"Oh ! the little fool ! the little fool !" she thought, trembling with anger, grief, and an insane joy. "If she knew what worldliness meant, she'd be easier to manage. Oh ! the paralysing, awe-striking audacity of pure ignorance. And the comedy of it ! the bitter, bitter comedy of it !"

CHAPTER XXII.

JAMES took a quick step forward, intending in his masterful way to secure Joyce for his own share. But he was arrested by the pain and laughter in Elinor's eyes. In the second's pause, Jock slipped quietly between him and his first intention.

With a resignation that surprised himself, James accepted the situation. He felt it to be quite practicable to worship the back of an ideal with perfect ease and at the same time talk to a woman as calm as Elinor, especially if you had something specially important to say to her.

That was the refreshing thing about a friendship so staunch as theirs. It ran without a jerk, and no new development could make the slightest difference in it.

There lurked in the fine, wholesale mind of James not the smallest doubt but that Elinor, however wistful and wilful she might on occasion be, would be just as ready and zealous to worship his ideal's back as he himself could be. Was he not even now overcoming mountains of prejudice in order to be able to accept Herbert Thorpe at the valuation she put on him?

Walking in the dusk with her, however, had an odd effect.

Suddenly it blotted out Herbert and the divine back, and he could think of nothing but Elinor—Elinor herself. The regal calm of her quiet face—now—and the great storms which they had fared through together—in those old days when her face had been the delicate, crystal clear mirror of a throbbing soul, and he had known all her dreams but one.

Not knowing or having known this, however, he could now say out just what he meant without reservation, in straightforward words, and with blissful unconsciousness punctuate them with stabs.

"We might be walking home to the rectory again after an afternoon in the town, mightn't we?" said James.

"I don't know—we might, I suppose, imagine a whirr of wheels in the air and a riot of full sulphur flame across the sky. But it's different."

"It was yesterday. But to-day I feel as though we had got back on the safe old track. And it's the best. What do you think?"

"I think—it's a difficult question."

"Elinor! I've been a fool, and rather a brute, now I think of it, ever to have had the confounded audacity to be afraid for you—for a woman whose face has grown as yours has done! You see, one knows more of one's self and one's kind than one does of women. A man at twenty-five will have the same instincts, bad or good, as he had at twenty. All he'll have done is to strengthen them, or keep them a bit under, perhaps. He may have a conscience somewhere, or sufficient shrewdness to see that it pays to range yourself. But we don't grow at the same amazing pace you do. I didn't know, by Jove! that you had grown ahead of me like this until I saw you just now. I'm glad I've got hold of you to tell you, and make my peace, you know, while I'm still sort o' full of that face of yours."

"I'm glad, too. You'd have forgotten altogether to tell me," said she, with a low laugh, "only that Jock Hallows beat you by just three steps."

"You know as well as I do," said James, in quite his old way, "that he wouldn't have beaten me unless I wanted him to. Your face had to be attended to first. It was an urgent face, my dear! After all," he added, with a stiffening of his shoulders, "the fact of Jock Hallows walking up the hill with Miss Anstiss can't very well make much difference to anything."

"Do you think then that those two feel as impersonal as—as we do?" asked Elinor.

He paused for a moment.

"Jock's just being forced into a thousand new interests. In his whole-hearted way he's filling himself with

little things to make up for the loss of the big thing he's missed. I doubt if there's room for a girl."

"Oh! do you? A girl can tuck herself away neatly enough among the other things."

"Miss Anstiss is still dreaming," he pursued, dreamily.

"Oh! in that case," said Elinor, with an odd look which the dusk swallowed.

"Girls have an exasperating trick of waking up at inconvenient moments," she said, presently.

"Are you warning me? It's no use. I'm a cart-horse, don't you know, and go slow at everything."

"On the contrary, you go like a whirlwind at some things."

"She's so young and untried and untravelled! One doesn't want to rush her. So far she knows more of hero-worship than she does of love."

"A man with a grain of sense in his head can soon repair that mistake!"

"Not so extraordinarily easy when he's set it going in her himself. That makes the thing a bit ridiculous, you see. She's idealised some notion of me bred in her brain by a duffing speech I made once. You wouldn't entrap so absolutely sincere a girl as that into tying herself for life to an illusion of her ardent brain."

"Her illusion, I daresay, is quite near enough to the fact," said Elinor, with sudden sharpness. "It's a good deal nearer, anyway, than your ideal of her."

"You don't know what my ideal of her is."

"I do. It's immaculate dulness in the minor key. She's far more interesting than that really, or will be when she's wider awake. Too much reflection is bad for love. What you want is action."

"I don't reflect on my part in it."

"No need to—you're born to devote yourself; to worship; and your ideal is a fixed quantity. You reflect on her, and she reflects on herself and regulates her ideal to the demands of a wobbling fancy tethered on every point by a rigid conscience."

"Elinor, how hard you can be!"

"I have to, with you so soft! Don't you see, while

you're thinking yourself into an ecstasy, she may be thinking herself into a doubt. In the constant contemplation of two blatant men, a girl may grow dazed. She's not used to men, she's lived amidst immature intellects, getting ready to be great, and in the meantime tinkering up their own littlenesses, a long-suffering world and a portentous purpose or so. Possibly, in a dim and absent way, she may have been aware of one or other of these insects dropping with singed wings at her feet. Trust a budding Socialist for a haughty point of view! That's been the sum total of her experience."

"Don't distress yourself, I think——"

"Thinking isn't to be trusted. You can never answer for a girl or a conscience. Just follow your instincts and give yourself without reflection."

"Yes, and coerce her into surrender!"

"Have you no pride? If your ideal does nothing else, I hope she'll show you your true value. But she won't; she knows too little of values generally. The fact of your being more or less of a millionaire has never even struck the girl. It's delightful of course, it makes you tread on tiptoe in your ridiculous sentimental way, but it's inhuman and extremely irritating to a right mind. You have had a London season or so; what did they teach you, I'd like to know!"

"To choose a wife different from every one else's. I'd like to be married—if I'm married at all—for an entirely brand-new set of reasons. You used to like originality!"

"I like common-sense better, and some sense of proportion."

"You're always forgetting the child's age."

"Yes, and her nebulous purity! Perhaps I am. It's difficult for the like of me to judge that sort of thing gently."

"You judge every one but yourself gently."

"And Joyce!"

"That's because I'm your first thought," said James, sublimely. "Some day you'll be judging your daughter-in-law in much the same way."

Her eyes flashed out at him. "Oh! shall I!"

He laughed. "You will! I feel rather like that myself about Herbert!"

A succession of short puffs now broke on the still air, and the rector was upon them.

"Now, Mrs. Thorpe," said he, in his big bustling way, "you just talk fripperies a bit with Miss Anstiss while I discuss a dry parish matter or so with these men."

Joyce's heart was beating in jerks. It had been the most harrowing little walk of her lifetime. She had set forth quaking with fear, breathless with expectancy. But now she was cold with a dreadful doubt. The walk also had tried Jock severely. Feeling the reaction of those radiant haunting minutes badly, with the awe of the woman fresh upon him, without courage either to go backward or forward, shy to his toes, he had kept a step or so away from Joyce and talked—village. Side by side with Jock in the soft moonlight village had jarred on her vilely, but now County Council matters, the Cottage Hospital, the last Vestry, fell with a weird fragrance upon Joyce's fascinated ears. The topics were but right and necessary. The choice of subject seemed not only to excuse the painful interruption, but even to take a little of the sting out of it. Duty, after all, was duty. Then of a sudden the scent of tobacco grew more pungent and the voices concentrated to a more urgent eagerness. "I wonder what it is," she thought wistfully, half turning her anxious little face, but she brought it round again like a shot.

"Oh! foxes again!" she murmured, blankly. Elinor laughed.

"Still that's not Mr. Hallowes' fault. He's eating out his heart this minute because he can't be at lions."

Joyce's eyes widened.

"Oh! is he?"

"Oh! didn't you know?" Elinor roused herself to improve the occasion. "Why! he'd made every arrangement to go off upon an important expedition, an imperial sort of thing really, but lions came largely into it. When he found out, however, the amazing state of his

father's affairs, he gave the thing up, and stayed at home."

"He never said a word of it," said Joyce, a little faintly.

"Perhaps he had too many words to say about other things," said Elinor, viciously.

"No," she said, with simple sadness, "there was plenty of time."

"No wonder they like her," thought Elinor, in despair. "She's absolutely impracticable. Men always like what confounds them, that is if the object is in her first youth."

"All of you here—think—think a great deal of love, don't you?" enquired Joyce, with startling suddenness.

"I'm afraid we do. It's a remote hunting neighbourhood full of primitive emotions, you see. We stick to old institutions."

"Oh! but it's serious to you. It's important, the one serious thing——"

"Except foxes!"

"Mrs. Thorpe, you wouldn't—if—if you knew!"

"My dear child!" Elinor had stooped to look at her face, and her own was blank with astonishment. "My dear child!—it's the most important thing in the whole world; it's at the root of all good and of all evil. It makes all the joy of the earth, and all the sorrow." Her voice seemed to break off into silence, and in an odd stillness the two walked on, both aching and both wondering.

"I wish to goodness I'd never looked into a Greek book. I wish I'd done nothing but read novels. I never read a word of one. I wish, I wish—I had—amused myself. I wish more than all, I wish that I had learnt to laugh," cried Joyce, the words rushing pell-mell on each other's heels; "then I might know—something of what girls ought to know."

"You're learning something now, I think," said Elinor, quietly.

"Perhaps, perhaps—I'm learning it wrong," she said, her voice quivering.

"It's only mistakes that will ever teach us the right way."

"Oh! what a miserable consolation."

"At any rate, it's all that one woman can give to another. Mistakes are a part of love."

Joyce shrank away from her. "Are Mr. Hallows' affairs really in an amazing state?" she said, at last, out of the pause, huskily.

"Only too really, I fear."

"They must have money?"

"They certainly must."

Joyce, through another long pause, chewed some little bitter cud. Then the words fairly burst from her.

"I have never found the things I'm not used to easy. They have always been difficult—in a way you wouldn't understand. I—I can't laugh, you know that's why perhaps. But I think—I really think the hardest things in the whole wide world—are—men!"

"That's when you regard them as works of art and are itching to put finishing touches to them. Take them in a spirit of resignation and hope," said Elinor, lightly, "and they are child's play."

The two men who hurt these women were too near them at the moment for any further yielding to strenuous emotion, and Joyce's hand, which with a strange unwilling tenderness she had taken in hers, was like ice and rigid.

"Another thing that tends to make men easy, and also exhilarating, is the fact that if a man is worth his salt, you yourself, directly he paused to think of you, are the one insoluble problem of the universe to him. And each woman likes to be the one sphinx. The humility of a man's attitude in the presence of the woman on this one point helps also to a saner understanding of him. And, oddly enough, the wiser he is and the bigger, the more humble you'll find him—in this stage. He gets over it later. But it's only the fools and blind who would, at any stage, think of professing any knowledge of woman—to a woman. It's the one subject, for various reasons, on which they hold their tongues, or speak in whispers. It will help you a lot to observe the humility of the proudest man when he's trying to find out things about you from yourself.

"But why should I be telling you this when you know perfectly well that James Coates, James Coates, no less is afraid of you!—and oh! if I could make you understand in the very least how big he is—and how much bigger it's in him to be, and yet he's afraid of—you!"

"Oh! Oh!"

Here Jock joined them, with an excited story concerning the discovery of a fresh pair of badgers on the river, and Elinor left them.

And once or twice during that bewildering homeward walk between the two men Joyce wished, with a vague wistfulness, that she were a little like other girls also, in another matter, and could believe in their God. He Who made men might possibly understand them and help a poor girl to a little knowledge both of them and of her own aching, baffling heart.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NO one but herself knew, or indeed could quite have understood the extraordinary sort of time that now set in for Joyce. She was caught and held in a bewildering mist of anxious expectancy. Her whole being seemed to be revolving itself into one wavering mark of interrogation.

There was such an incredible amount for a girl to find out! All at once there had come a rush of new meanings into earth and air and sky. And the part of Joyce seemed to be to find out the right answer to each problem. This might have been possible had not the one thought invariably contradicted the other. When she thought of James, and was getting into a right and reverent frame of mind, uplifted, thrilled, awed, Jock's light laugh would bring the strenuous, soul-inspiring march of her sensations to a delicious, idle saunter.

When some grave little act of worship on the part of James had lifted her sheer to Heaven, an easy joke of Jock's breathing *camaraderie* could bring her back panting for earth.

The only easy minutes in the day now were those she spent in the old nursery being taught to dance by an old French governess who had, in her day, also taught Jock Hallowes. The carpet had been taken up and the floor washed with milk. A medley of Jock's old toys stood on the broad oaken chimney-piece, cut all over with Jock's and Anthony's initials, mellowing with age, while a few of Jock's, bolder cut than the others, showed out amongst them light, brown and young.

A setter of Jock's, who had attached himself faithfully to Joyce's person, curled up before the fire, cocked a cynical sleepy eye at the ridiculous proceedings.

The fire blazed, as only fires can blaze in a room haunted with hope and innocence, where generations of

little children have seen visions of mystery and enchantment in the glowing coals.

And Cecilia played old floating soft waltzes with a feathery touch; and sheer simple, pure delight filled the hearts of the two old women and the young one.

In the solemn breathlessness with which Joyce danced, Cecilia saw herself again, her heart full of hope; without a wrinkle or a regret getting ready for all the joys of all the to-morrows. And the only thing about Jock that would keep in her mind was that he, too, had noticed this distinguishing likeness.

As for the old French woman, she was ecstatic in the firm conviction that she was preparing the future bride of Jock for her high estate. True, she had received sundry discreet though incisive hints to the contrary. She was a woman with a gift for presentiment, however, and disdained to distract her outlook by regarding hints.

And all the time Joyce danced she was wrapped up in a rosy dream, undisturbed by the warring claims of Archangel and Man, after the dimmest, vaguest, unearthliest fashion in the world, in love with love!

Long before the night of the party Mrs. Hallows had returned to her duty, and when she and Elinor went together to Joyce's room, each was possessed of an unswerving resolve—Mrs. Hallows to keep a firm eye upon Jock's interests; Mrs. Thorpe upon those of James.

"There's dancing and expectancy in the very air. It would be nice to have one's first ball over again," said Elinor, as they crossed the landing to a little corridor upon which the two girls' guest-rooms opened.

Cecilia, in her dainty old sentimental way, had had one of these decorated in white and the other in rose-pink. And because the first time she had seen Joyce she had struck her as looking like a girl making ready for her first Communion, deciding to ignore the anti-Christian rumours that had reached her, and hope, she had put her in the white room.

"Something always happened," said Cecilia, smiling, "just before what was to have been my first ball, and in the end I missed it altogether! Sometimes I really

think that I must have missed everything, and be the most ignorant old woman in all these latter days."

"I think you must be the sweetest, not to show one trace of disappointment on your face," said Elinor, in a loving, impulsive, sincere way that made the other look at her.

"It's rather unfair to other people to blazon out on your face all that's going on inside you. And don't you think, my dear," said Cecilia, with a little air of pride, that it's rather underbred. We ought to train our faces to self-control and seemliness, as—as our passions." Elinor smiled oddly. From those lips the word sounded whimsical. "After a time, you see, the face acquires the habit. Besides, I have the advantage over those who've had everything. I've never been disillusionised! All the missed things are as fragrant in my mind now as they were then. They're there as fresh and fair and merry as dreams, and that, after all, is a good deal."

"And you're here to help us others, and that's a good deal more!"

Mrs. Hallowes paused beside a cabinet of old china and looked at her keenly, then she opened the door quietly and took out a piece of old Chelsea and handed it to Elinor. "That's the dish I was telling you about," she said, still watching her.

"It would never have struck me that you could need help, Mrs. Thorpe. I thought that you were made to give it."

Elinor, still examining the china, laughed. "That comes of being so tall. Height gives a meretricious air of stability."

But Cecilia's eyes were upon her still, always with a doubt.

"Perhaps you're right," she said, absently, after a second's pause, replying to her own thoughts. "I've spent a good deal of my time sitting silent and watching. It's dull at the time, but you—pick up things. And after all I believe it's the strong woman, not the weak one, who most needs help and sometimes falls for want of it. The thing that often most surprises me in the fall

of a strong woman, is the folly of the—some—one who neglected to hold out a hand to her at the right moment. It's only the weak who are really self-sufficient; the stubbornness born of weakness upholds them, and half the tragedies of the world are due, I'm really inclined to think, to some man's overestimating the strength of some woman, or misinterpreting her weakness. If men would but learn the lesson," sighed Cecilia, "in regard both to the weak and to the strong, I believe it might tend to the general good."

"Being docked of their privileges, you mean, all the weak would wilt away."

"On the contrary, my dear, upon ascertaining that weakness does not pay, I trust and believe that in time they would renounce the pernicious habit."

When they entered the radiant whiteness of Joyce's room they were both smiling discreetly. She was standing in the midst of it like a star only just awake. Smiling still, but curiously moved, both the women went to her. Swiftly, and with a few finishing strokes, the triumph of art over nature, they wrought a subtle, arresting, altering spell over Joyce.

Her pain being of long standing, and of the past, Cecilia's hands, as they moved delicately here and there, trembled. But Elinor's being quite fresh in her heart, and of the future, her hands were steady.

"And now," said she, when they had done, "turn round, you sleeping star, and wake up to the fact that you're a beauty. Look in the glass! Not like that! Look as though you meant to be a beauty since the first day you began, and could anticipate all the homage."

"My dear!" murmured Cecilia, back in the sentiment of the thirties.

"Oh! Mrs. Hallowes, you know it won't do! She'll fall flat at this rate. She might as well have been born with a snub nose! The wisest of men are fools in this matter." She pointed an accusing finger at Joyce. "If a woman doesn't lead them to her best points, they frequently fall foul of them. Being a beauty is one of the highest arts."

"My dear Mrs. Thorpe," cried Cecilia, with an odd look at her, "why don't you practise it, then?"

"Because I believe in the fitness of things. It's an attitude unbecoming a curate's wife. Some day—perhaps—who knows!"

"I hope I shall be there to see! I'm inclined to agree with you, Mrs. Thorpe." She touched Joyce's knot of shining hair reverently, as one touches a sacred relic.

"A queen has a right to queen it! Indeed, it's her duty to herself and," said Cecilia solemnly, "to one other."

"Which one? Oh! which one?" thought Joyce swiftly, hot with guilt.

"Of course she has," struck in Elinor; "more especially with the world thick with pretenders. And look at the courts they gather! Why it's an opportunity to reform an abuse and advance the truth! My dear child, your face, if you take it reasonably, will do more for your party than ever your principles could do. It's far more convincing. But reformation's a slow and subtle process. You can't rush at an abuse with a prong as you would at a hay-cock. You must, especially if it's a man—abuses, according to the New Law, are all of masculine origin—undo him bit by bit, so gently that he doesn't even realise what you're after until it's done."

Elinor laughed softly at Joyce's face in the great oval glass. "It's in putting him together again that you'll get in the word in season."

Joyce, although she drank in this counsel seemingly with some degree of intelligence, still stared hard in the glass. But now she turned round and gravely contemplated her mentors.

"I'm giving up hoping not to amuse people," she said, seriously. "Perhaps, if I had lived about here myself, I should have been amused in my turn. Do—do you really mean—she fairly raked their countenances—do you really mean then I'm really—good-looking?"

"We really do mean that you're really good-looking," said Elinor, with a laugh.

"Do you think I should be noticed in a big place—

well, in London?" she enquired, with an increase of gravity.

"My dear Joyce," said Cecilia, "I think that even in London you might reign a little queen."

"That depends! You'll never reign at all unless you learn to assume sovereign power and bear yourself like one to the manner born; otherwise you'll always look like a timorous usurper."

"If one has rights, one can learn to use them," said Joyce, looking gravely into space, but with a new confidence. "It must make things much easier," she resumed, sighing, her eyes back on Elinor, "to understand as much as you do about men."

"On the contrary, it's far easier if you can only sit at their feet and learn there, believing what they tell you of themselves. You must cultivate a progressive and adaptable mind, and a nice girl with that will be quite safe in her trust. Inspired by her, a man will be no more than just to himself; only, with ordinary men, you mustn't interrupt too much with exhortations, you know, else he'll think you're addressing him in type, and a man likes a girl's mind to be fixed on him, not tracking generalities or her own inward convictions. You must forget everything but the man, and just drop in the little things about yourself and the infinities by the way. It's only in this way that two can ever be of one mind; that the man can retain his self-esteem and the woman her sovereignty, and everything go with a swing. I'm speaking of common man—not exceptions, you know."

"Then," said Joyce, standing very straight, "an exception must be ever so much easier to get on with than a common man. I—I couldn't imagine an exception acknowledging a schemer for Queen."

"There's a lot of common man even in an exception, otherwise he'd be a monster."

"My dear Mrs. Thorpe," said Cecilia, puzzled and bridling a little, "for our little girl here, is this surely not rather cynical and worldly counsel?"

"The simple truth can be both cynical and worldly."

"Even the truth, my dear lady, calls on occasion for a little reserve."

"Joyce wants a little truth of a top-dressing nature before she steps down out into the world, don't you think? Unless we see to it, she'll be fading away for want of some earth about her heels. She lives too much in air now, and she's expecting every one else to do the same. And, after all, we can't all be pitcher plants."

"I don't mind in the least what you say," said Joyce, turning suddenly to watch her curiously. "You look so different! And—in a sort of a way I'm beginning to know what you mean. There are a variety of men—and they differ dreadfully," she added in a sort of protest, with a question in each limpid eye.

"But only one counts," said Cecilia, with prim dignity.

"A young girl finds it difficult sometimes to focus her mental vision," interposed Elinor, mildly, "and meanwhile it wobbles a little."

"In that case her heart must guide her."

"A heart without experience! Oh! Mrs. Hallowses, you might as well hang St. John's Gospel round a girl's neck to cure madness. Hearts are so well-intentioned, but——"

"What, then, do you suggest?" said Mrs. Hallowses, with a touch of frost.

"A rough division of mankind into two great divisions might help, perhaps—one which looks upon woman as a star; the other who regards her as a second self. The latter is the good old English point of view."

"If a man looks upon you as a star," said Joyce, softly, but with mounting courage, "he must be worth your—your—worship himself."

"But some girls prefer a man who's worth stamping at. That's all the difference."

"She doesn't know what she wants," thought Elinor, drearily, "and she'll be accepting James in a fog of doubt, and wake up later—and that's what I saved him for!"

"Oh! my dear Mrs. Thorpe, you're incorrigible! Joyce, come down!"

As the insidious hushed whisper of youth all beautiful and bedecked in the air, the audience of three turned from a heated discussion of patent manures to look at it.

"And that's how you looked, then, when you were a girl!" said Jock, after a little pause, turning in his kind way to his step-mother.

And then Cecilia completely lost her head.

"Oh! Jock," she cried, softly, "just see how she dances!"

The old woman sat down to the piano, and the tune she played was as young as Joyce, and in it there was all the sweetness that Joyce had yet to learn.

Elinor was going forward to James, who, leaning stiffly against the chimney-piece, looked grim and cold, but she knew bitterly that every atom of him was quick with the surprise of Joyce's awakening.

The Squire, however, intercepted her by a mute gesture of entreaty which, since he was helpless with gout, she was too good-natured to disregard.

"My dear Mrs. Thorpe" said Anthony, "what tricks have you ladies been playing with that little girl? She's begun to try experiments, I notice. She's practising, bless my soul! look at her! she's practising being a woman! It's a naïve effect," said he, his eyes fixed grudgingly upon the fair, floating vision, "but—to those in authority—somewhat discomposing! She was getting bad enough even before she suspected her power. You and my wife, my dear lady, have assumed a grave responsibility." He paused, with sad reproach. "Take care she doesn't—ahem!—set out her body to damn her soul or—hum!—that of others. Remember what a good man said of, 'Purple robes and torn conscience.' The girl did well enough as she was."

Elinor being a wise woman, always let the Squire get off his mind, without interruption, all he had to say.

"The little girl," he pursued, with an admiring glance at her, "did better—from every point of view wrapped in a cloud. It's more seemly that a girl of her age should make a man think to pray than forget to pray. I doubt if either of you ladies who have let loose this

force on us has a notion of its power. Our young fellows are too sorely tried!" he said, plaintively. "Why, in God's name, couldn't a girl with an adequate fortune look like that?"

"It's fortunate," said Elinor, serenely "that Mr. Coates can well afford—that sort of thing."

"Mr. Coates! the chemical man!" He paused to fling a hopeless look at his son and his son's candid countenance. "Mr. Coates! he's an entirely admirable young man. I have a profound respect for him; he's overcome much. The unfortunate part of the business is that Jock could sweep him out with a broom!"

It was difficult to reply to this, so Elinor waited, and not in vain.

"What, in heaven's name, is the use of a conscience," resumed Anthony, "or a sense of parental responsibility to a woman like Mrs. Hallowes, with her soft heart wiping both, one at every turn.

"It's the downright unscrupulous woman alone who'll do right by the young." He moved irritably, to the grievous discomfort of his toe. Elinor placidly put it right.

"But think of a fellow like Jock, with important affairs to conduct, bobbing to each change of mood in a Radical pauper. Oh! my dear young lady, I know I'm brutal—I daresay she's an angel as well—but consider the provocation!"

"These things are hereditary, I always think," said Elinor, sweetly. "There was a day, I've no doubt, when even you might have forgotten politics hid in perfection. I believe you'd think quite poorly of Mr. Jock Hallowes if he failed to snatch a temporary oblivion from business in a little picture of a thing like that!"

"Humph!" He turned to examine this advocate.

"You're too young and handsome yourself, Mrs. Thorpe, to turn special pleader for another girl. It's not a wholesome frame of mind." Looking furtively at her, he caught an odd glance she threw at James, and one of his sudden and unexpected flashes of insight came to the Squire. He laid his fat old hand on Elinor's

slim young one. "I know you're good," said he. "I hope, my dear, that you're happy."

She flushed deeply. "I didn't think any one need have asked that," she said, laughing.

Anthony could be astute on occasion. He was quite aware that she had not replied to his question.

"Just now," she went on, quietly, "I am looking as much as I can at Miss Anstiss from a man's point of view, because some day I hope to see her the wife of James Coates, and he is my dearest friend."

"Oh, that's it! The admiration is vicarious. That's more human and wholesome. Your dearest friend, is he? By George! and Jock swears by him. Dear me! I could wish that he wasn't a Radical. It isn't fair on the fellow; it's hardly fair on us. He has to suffer—more or less—for the quality of his condition. Well, we must do what we can for him," he said, indulgently. "It's an unprogressive neighbourhood though, as no doubt you may have observed. There are still some amongst us—you have met Sir Harry"—said Anthony, with a tolerant smile, "set fast in old prejudices. Strange, too," he mused, "since most houses possess a library—of sorts. My dear Mrs. Thorpe, you might go over and explain to the young man the absolute irresponsibility in this little flutter of Jock's; these minor truths upon which women drop by instinct sometimes escape a man."

"Why, in God's name," he thought, his eyes on her beautiful figure, "didn't she marry this piece of chemical perfection then. But, hang it all! that wouldn't have done much towards helping us out of this mess."

"Why isn't she at the ball, Cecilia?" he enquired magisterially of Mrs. Hallows, who had just come to him from the piano.

"She has rather strict ideas on some subjects; she thinks her husband out of place in a drawing-room."

"I knew there was something behind that woman," said the Squire, darkly. "She'd have made a magnificent wife for a millionaire."

"Yes," said Cecilia, in innocent absence of mind. She was gazing entranced upon Jock.

"No woman living can grasp more than one point of view at a time," sighed the Squire, "unless," he added, viciously, "they happen to be in the shape of man! Then her breadth of view would take your breath away."

"She'll be just right as your wife," Elinor was saying. "You're so maladroit, you'd never do to peer round corners, and still less is it in you to pass over anything, or to take it for granted. There's nothing round any corner in Joyce that could alarm even you, and there will be nothing to gloss over. James," she cried, with a sudden odd change of voice, "I believe you'd thoroughly enjoy living week in week out with Herbert!"

James let the last part of her remark pass. "There's no question about her. It's myself. I'm rather unwieldy for this business, you see. I don't mind difficulties as a rule, but the happiness of a woman is a poser. It gruels you."

"You can't catch happiness and haul it bodily into a life; you can at best only coax and entreat it, and you'll want her to live with you in the clang and clash of life; therefore you mustn't worry yourself to death when she worries herself into—a bigger life over the countless problems that will keep cropping up in her path. She's so honest she'll face them all, and suffer from each of them ignorantly, very possibly. But she'll be growing, and that ought to be enough for you. You take everything but women unflinchingly. I wish to goodness you'd learn to take them in the same way. You can't let your wife—if she's to be a wife at all—live amongst doves in a garden."

He looked at her quickly.

"Do you think she'd like to live amongst doves in a garden?"

"I don't know, any more than she knows," said Elinor, sharply.

"But could she, without worrying herself to a thread-paper? Could she, being herself, stand aside and dream amongst flowers?"

Elinor sighed softly and laughed. "A garden is very soothing, and there's healing in potherbs. Most women with the right to it could live very comfortably in a garden. Women who think of their flowers don't think of their consciences, and their hearts keep fresh and young."

As now often happened, instead of thinking of Joyce, James fell to wondering about Elinor, and Joyce, thrilling with the intoxication of her first dance with Man for partner, was trying hard to lift her eyes above Man to James.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE Hunt ball at Brecon Park was another affair altogether from the County Hunt ball ; a mixed function managed by a committee. It took place later at the other end of the shire, and they all wore their Brecon Park dresses at it.

The neighbourhood surrounding Falde was an exclusive and discreet one, nothing slack or movable in its points of view ; as hereditary and old established, as a rule, as its acres. Naturally, therefore, it was critical of new importations and careful to the best of its ability that the feminine quality in its balls should be entirely local.

There was a further reason for this unswerving exclusiveness. Amongst the honest gentlemen who lived hard by Falde there was a melancholy superfluity of girls of their own to be provided for. And to the responsible minds of the elders of the community, upon the one occasion in the year when a stray extra eligible or so brightened the horizon, it seemed almost like flying in the face of Providence to hamper his judgment and confound his natural instincts with outsiders.

Armed all, no doubt, with strange arts, sure to be of the devil and enchanting.

It were well that once in a while jaded men should be brought face to face with Innocence undisturbed.

For although a man may hope to do something for his daughters, after his death, it is hard lines to have them hanging like mill-stones about his neck through all the length and breadth of a long and lusty life, with horses and the keeping up of a house growing dearer day by day, and the girls no younger.

But this year was an exception. A whole houseful of disturbers of the peace—wolves, worldly-minded and wide-awake—was planked down upon the defenceless

flock. The raid was organised and marshalled by an active-minded lady with a sovereign intellect and educational views ; further hampered by a simple mind which adored the County, and a complex body that demanded the Town.

An ill-timed family affliction had just now driven her to the refuge of her husband's hereditary and abhorred mansion, where, however, half-mourning would not matter, though every villager in the place knew well that it ought to have been full and of the deepest. What were villagers, after all ? And deep black simply blotted out Mrs. Wolly-Dod.

Out of her own set the lady had a mind above conventions. She knew better than to come unaccompanied. She left her husband, by way of a Christmas treat, rejoicing at his Club, and brought with her three young women, calculated to make Falde "see stars."

The filling up of the beginning of the programme was at Brecon Park, like its points of view, more or less of an hereditary obligation. Jock knew well that until he should have run the gauntlet of his hostess's demands he could not call his soul his own ; and for sheer good-nature, in order this first night of her true liberty to give her a free hand, he only put himself down on Joyce's programme for three dances half-way down it. Only partly apprehending his motives, and in no sort of way appreciating them, Joyce was bitterly disappointed. She was afraid that even after that brief whirl together into a new heaven, he still mistrusted her "steps." She hoped, falteringly, that he would notice how well she did them with James.

The dreadful thing was that she in her turn mistrusted James. Her mind refused stubbornly to grasp her first Prophet in the evolution of a waltz.

Thus, when in his fine grave way he came to claim her, although her heart went out to him eagerly, it was because she felt that she would find rest and peace in his capable grasp from the longing ache for her dances with Jock, and for the still more bitter ache because of the way in which Jock was amusing himself with the romp-

ing, rollicking Miss St. Johns and Betty. The latter clearly resolved not to be outdone by the Town girls.

Moreover, it was a quiet, beautiful and abiding joy to watch how well James shone out amongst the Elect.

As she swung round in his arms, for her fears notwithstanding, he kept excellent time; Joyce felt soothed, uplifted and in a rarer atmosphere; an archangel entered largely into her enjoyment, but yet it was not Heaven! Seemingly, in order to help a girl to reach that, a man is necessary!

All this did Joyce feel in a dim way, and because of the hardness of her heart, and the stiffness of her understanding, she sighed. At the same time she was humble. "Give me understanding," was her one little, bruised, voiceless cry. But it was understanding of Jock. She felt quite clear about James. Reverence and adoration were in the marrow of her bones. The thing that threw out all her thoughts and clouded every belief was the amazing fact that Jock should apparently have wiped clear out of his consciousness that illuminating five minutes branded burning into hers.

As a matter of fact, in the twenty-seven hours or so that had elapsed since then Jock's mind had been hunted and harried by destroying details; and although these minutes were all the time taking steady root in his big unhurried and unhurrying heart, he could yet be silent concerning them and make no sign.

Meanwhile, having done a hard day's work, he was enjoying himself tremendously. The magnificent audacity of the three Miss St. Johns was invigourating. He had so far not come across this sort of thing done quite so well; he found it "ripping." While Betty's innocent attempt to reach at a bound what had cost the other ladies years of honest labour to attain, made him feel rather sorry. They had been babies together, more or less, he and Betty, and no man likes so old a friend as that to make a fool of herself. Just to keep her quiet he felt bound to dance with her more than once. And yet, oddly enough, never before had Joyce been so extraordinarily near and ever-present with this leisurely young man.

Every sally of the gay St. Johns, or antic of Betty's, swung Joyce but the higher in his imagination. She stood out in her white rarity, a priceless jewel amongst tawdry imitations. Smaller by a head than the others, yet she rose high above them like a queen. She was so sweet and radiant, so wistful and kind. The little veil of hardness behind which she had chosen to hide herself had slipped off this evening. And the proud, fearless, pure consciousness of her beauty which covered her instead, although he knew nothing of its cause, its name, or its nature, yet strangely arrested Jock.

She was a new Joyce, and she stirred him newly. All of a sudden he felt a longing for his dances with her. He went out into the frosty air, to rid himself of some clinging violet scent left hanging upon him by the most brilliant of the three St. Johns. Afterwards he would get Joyce to sit out the next dance with him.

When he came back, however, she was dancing. So Jock, his duty done, and other girls no longer delighted in, went over to talk to his step-mother about the one girl who was worth while. Mrs. Hallowes was very glad to see him; she had been feeling a little guilty, and Jock had a way of sweeping any unnecessary sensation of sin out of the air. Her place of course was by her suffering husband, but fifty years before her place had been beside another suffering old man not her husband; and she had kept it and missed her first ball. And the temptation of going to her next, seeing herself in the person of Joyce, dancing all the old missed dances, had been too deadly. Cecilia had fallen to it ignominiously. And the first epoch-making joy of the event over, she was feeling a little depressed, perhaps not so much for thought of groaning Anthony, but because of that incredible radiance upon the face of Joyce, which had missed hers.

To think of her own face with that glory transfiguring it, and so many to see? It made her a little giddy. She tried to think of Anthony, but she could think of nothing but this bewildering light which, if a girl chance to miss in her early youth, seek how she will, never will she find again. And although her face may shine as the days

drift and hopes flicker and die with a light more holy and serene, far more conclusive to the peace of man, and the good of her own soul, Cecilia smiled sadly, yet will the heart stiffly refuse to resign itself to this frivolous loss. On the contrary, it will bleed and tremble no matter how old, and if it be kind, rejoice with a chastened joy whenever a woman sees that missed glory of hers upon the face of any other.

The sight of Jock braced up Mrs. Hallowes, and because she was feeling rather ashamed of her own feebleness of mind, she felt more than usual disposed to mercy.

There was something in the way wherein the young man looked at Joyce that she did not at all like, and yet now it arrested and enthralled this foolish woman. She sat bolt upright and tried her best to look like a real mother.

"I think to-night will cure her of the worst of her Radical principles," said Jock.

An instinctive knowledge that sentiment and County morality were ever at war within Cecilia; also that in speaking of Joyce she was constantly hampered by the whimsical conceit of Joyce's being in an elusive sort of way her own old self, made Jock go straighter to his point than he might have done with a less romantic lady with his material interests at heart.

"My dear Jock! I sincerely hope not. Think of her conscience to-morrow! Besides, it would hardly be fair to Mr. Coates."

The magnificent derision that rang out in Jock's laugh made Cecilia shudder inwardly.

"He's never had a rival yet. He wouldn't so much as grasp the idea of one—as applied to himself! Oh! my dearest! no wonder you look beautiful! But, oh! I wonder how you'll come out of this?"

"Poor old Jim," said Jock, affectionately, "he's idealised woman to a point far above love-making! Woman is his religion."

"A beautiful phase," pronounced Cecilia, with a somewhat tart approval. "Very pleasant to hear of it in a modern young man. But it may not last."

"Oh! it will last all right. Besides—gad! I'd pity the girl. Imagine having to live up to James' notion of her every day of the week. Might as well be a saint on a pedestal at once."

"Oh! blind bat!" she thought, distractedly.

"A girl can do much in a short time towards humanising an abstraction," she said, primly.

Jock grinned.

"He's beyond hope! Why, he's been pursued by mothers ever since he came of age. There's no room in him for that sort of thing. If you know all that the fellow does, and all he intends to do. Women aren't in it—except for purposes of devotion."

Cecilia stared, admired, and then she fairly lost her temper.

"I don't know what Mr. Coates means to do or to leave undone. All I do know is, that only she's above the rapacious demand of a slave-owner, and would never permit him thus to lower himself, in a month Mr. Coates will be running her messages."

Jock began to laugh, but the laugh broke off into silence, and presently, after a long pause, in a dulled voice he muttered, "By Jove!"

It was not until then that Cecilia realised what she had been doing.

All through this precious opportunity, instead of warning Jock, she had been mixing up the present and the past as in a dream, and pleading the cause of herself reincarnated. It was a stirring amongst the dry bones that might help towards disaster.

Already, after a single polite mutter, was Jock marching through the room with purposeful tread. Cecilia looked as scared as one like her could well look; then she went back humbly and took her place amongst the matrons, fat and far-reaching, who when they set forth to make young England, know well what they are about.

CHAPTER XXV.

"THERE'S something in not boring a man, but there's more in not letting him see that he bores you. That's a true heroism. Heavens! Let me stretch!"

The first Miss St. John plumped down beside the second, and having yawned, the two proceeded very unaffectedly to stretch.

"You might have waited until he was out of hearing."

"It would never strike him that the truth applied. I sent him away so happy. His mind is simple and uncynical. He's gone to stare at that little Anstiss person."

"And to recover from you."

"Oh! well! when he's shed all his sins before her shrine, he'll return to me and the world with renewed zest. She has her uses, although she does diffuse a spirit of devotion. She has also an Effect, which is much more to the purpose. I don't mind a man speaking of another girl; it shows his confidence in *you*. But why need he gape when he mentions her name?"

"It's the thought of his sins."

"A girl who reminds a man of his sins in an unconditionally unpleasing light won't last, that's one comfort!"

"She'll last long enough to land her slick on a big coup!" observed the other, elegantly.

"Such waste of a millionaire! He doesn't even pretend to a father, not to say a grandfather. You'd think that sort of person would have taken a title to wife. He need only put his hand, hardly that."

"He's not a dead loss, anyway; he removes an obstruction."

"He does, only to make it worth overcoming. Think of that lukewarm piece of innocence after the eye-opener of a marriage to a millionaire and an allowance. Nothing like diamonds to spur your wits."

"In that case we can only hope that he'll keep her in the home-paddocks of his club—if he gets her—that is, until she's sunk in Babies. Mr. Hallowes is portentously silent about the little wretch. I did my best to draw him about that hunt."

"That's nothing. He's made like that. He looks like an amiable hay-stack, and begins to chaff you about something else directly you begin about any girl."

"He knows how to flirt, at least, so one can forgive him a good deal. Wonder where he got his experience. The way in which he begins in a rush and then appears to forget all about you is rather fetching somehow; it draws you on."

"It's my private opinion that its drawn her on, and she believes in it, poor goose, and in him. She's choking with faith, that girl."

"I thought she was an atheist."

"Oh, bother! I allude to faith in man!"

"Ah!"

"They're wiser than they look, these people. He's booked for Betty Rawson, yet look at the free hand they give him."

"If they didn't, he'd take it. Takes what he likes, that gentleman!"

"No man living but would insist upon waltzing round a bit before finally settling down to Betty."

"Perhaps he won't settle down."

"Won't he? It's practically arranged, they say. He's a pauper. Faldeholm, after all, isn't good enough to draw a big haul from outside. And don't you know the Hallowes love their land, as no man in his senses now-a-days would think of loving a girl."

"It's only when he's lost his senses that any man ever does think of doing such a thing. Do be just, anyway."

"Oh! well, the land's stood by them a long time; and with these country people somehow their land is their honour. Catch them betraying it. They see that big young Hallowes has a passion for his old home. Oh! well, anyway, if he'd had a passion for her, he'd have swept out works long ago! She's enticing from

their point of view, the creature. He's had a little flutter with her, no doubt, to keep his hand in, but take my word for it, that innocent has his head screwed on the right way. Look at his eyes. More than once to-day I got a Roland for my Oliver. Besides, didn't you see him with Betty? The way in which he keeps her on the string and yet amuses himself, shows genius. Wonder where little Miss Prim is? There's the chemical man on the prowl."

"Being worshipped in some corner during an interval. Never met a Puritan yet who wasn't also sly cat. Oh! well, I feel like a lion refreshed. That man—that big fair person glowering under the lamp—must have sworn himself blue by this time. He put down his name twice for this dance, and underlined it, look!"

Whereupon the first Miss St. John yawned heartily and sauntered off to the east, whilst the other, having yawned likewise, tripped in her turn towards the west. It was only in intervals of rest that these astute and elegant ladies ever hung together, and they made it a matter of principle to do nothing in precisely the same way. To have been recognised by the swing of her hips for one of a family, would have been the death of either of the three. Any man with eyes in his head would have recognised each a mile off for *herself*, by her walk and the set of her shoulders, and this, since their ultimate aims in no sort of way differed, was an achievement.

There was a little soft rustle of silk from the other side of the pot-plants, and Joyce stood up, and then sat down again. Her fan dropped on her lap, and quite involuntarily she clasped her hands together. Not a word of the two had escaped her; had she not been dumb with pain, her sense of honesty might have suggested to her to betray her inconvenient presence; as it was she sat through the dialogue hardly daring to breathe lest she should lose a word of it. There was honest conviction in each utterance of the redoubtable twain, and whatever they might not be, they certainly were as wise as serpents. She was forced to believe

them; she was forced to believe also that they were justified in their faith. So this was a way of his—of—Jock's. He began with a rush and then forgot all about you—such was the habit of this young man! Was flirting, then, something as far apart as the poles from love? She shut her eyes to crowd back the tears. She tried to recall what he had said to her, but the words scampered away from her; she saw nothing but his look, and the two Miss St. Johns had seen that also, as likewise had Betty!

She had chosen this little corner that she might have a little respite from the bewildering fire of eyes. She had been feeling rather scorched, but directly she sat down she forgot the eyes and began to think out Jock a little and wonder what he meant to her—or if he meant anything.

The answer to her reflections appeared to be contained in the frank comments of the Miss St. Johns.

The dull ache in every nerve seemed to get worse. Doubt, pride, fear, quavered in her eyes. She was entirely alone in the corridor which led to the conservatory, and the silence hurt her. It seemed suddenly as though she had come to a full stop, and could never go on again. She did not quite know how to start.

The hush swam wider around and above her; it closed her in; it confused her. Being in love with love has its disadvantages; it prevents a girl from loving wholly and hard, and all the time this phase goes on she must of necessity see men more or less as trees walking.

This was the case with Joyce. Her brain was full of James, her heart bursting with Jock, and they were both clamouring within her, and both commanding. She looked about her wildly, but she saw nothing; her eyes were blind with tears.

And this muddle of mind was in a great part the fault of James. He knew too little of women to be wise. In the strength and absoluteness of his adoration, in following the great he neglected the little things. He clean forgot to worm himself into the girl's imagination, and permitted it to get full of Jock. Indeed, in his simple,

straightforward way, he helped materially to fill it. Through a sort of habit he worked bravely for the other man!

No tittle of this truth touched him, however, as he paused now to watch Joyce.

She was sitting, this victim of inexperience, her hands still clasped, her eyes full of questions, her mouth of pathos. She stood up slowly to shake her will back to life. Then she saw James. The very sight of him seemed to draw quiet fingers across her throbbing brain. Hardly knowing what she did, she put out both her hands and went towards him. This sealed effectually the fate of James, and gave a definite turn to her own destiny.

"Come," said he, his face for the first time in his life as fine and delicate as his best thoughts, "come out of this glare." Joyce's fascinated eyes rested, marvelling, upon his face! She went with him blindly out through the dim light of the conservatory on into the mystery of the night. James snatched up an abandoned cloak from a sofa and wrapped it round her softly.

"You're not afraid of the cold?" he said, huskily. "The house feels small."

Joyce said nothing. She was fighting a terror colder than the frost. But she trembled; and that was enough for James. He was trembling himself, and knew all that it meant.

"I think I must have known it must be you, of all the women in the world, ever since I began to know what love meant or that I should want it," said he, at last. "It's been all absolutely inevitable; I was always dreaming of you, and I loved you, I think, that first day when you spoilt my lecture."

"I?" she said, faintly. "Was it me?"

"Who else could it be? But—I wasn't sure of you—I daren't be sure—until just now. But, Joyce," he said, out of the quivering silence at last, "won't you say anything?"

The verandah where they were was lit softly from the glowing lights within, and James' face stood out firm and clear. It was the face of which she had dreamed also, the best face she had ever seen. For the first time in her

life she recognised this clearly, and in a human sort of way. A sudden prayer leapt up in her eyes, as she lifted them to his. Marriage with James would be a great thing for a girl, and the worship of such a man was a magnificent compliment.

James started and caught her and held her out at arms' length. It was a little side conservatory, and empty. He saw clear enough to be sure of that!

"You're not thinking of me as a reformer, or a leader, or any of that sort of rot?"

His eyes were shooting out enquiries at her baffling face, his grasp hurt her wrists.

"I—I'm not thinking of you at all——"

"Oh!"

"I'm sure of you. There's no one like you. I'm thinking—I'm thinking," she said, in jerks, "of myself, what it all means to me. I'm not sure—I'm not sure of anything but you, and I—I don't quite know what—love means."

"Oh! that's nothing. I can teach you. But," he said, with sudden remembrance, stooping to look at her, "I think you do know. You knew when you came to meet me."

"Then—then I was wondering——"

"Then wonder looks extraordinarily like love," he said, with a happy laugh. The laugh was as fine as his face, and new and startling.

She held him in such reverence, she worshipped him with so single a heart, she had wanted him, or the like of him, now for so long, that no one doubt thrust out all the others. She understood nothing; he understood everything. Perhaps this *was* love.

"Haven't you a word?" He caught and kissed her; she gave a little dry sob, and when he gathered her triumphantly into his arms, to hide her face in his breast, seemed bliss unspeakable. She glowed and thrilled and lay closer.

"It is love," she thought, desperately. "It's love. What else could it be? Oh! if I knew—if I knew—if I knew—anything!"

But James saw nothing but the little white cheek nestled meekly against his heart.

"You have everything—everything that I have always been wanting," he said, in a voice which moved her strangely. "You'll do everything for me. With you to believe in, to be there always, I can do anything."

The consciousness that no one was like this man—no one—almost against her will poured into her, and of a sudden she remembered something that Elinor Thorpe had once said to her.

She slipped out of his arms and stood up before him like a little school-girl.

"I'll do my very best to be as good as you think me," she said, simply. "It—it would be awful to—to hamper—a man."

"You adorable goose! But you're shivering, and it's freezing hard. Come in," he said, swinging her in out of the night. His strength in this new relation appalled her, but his face, so lofty and masculine, uplifted her strangely.

It was a reassertion of his old power over her, curiously intensified and spiritualised.

She looked as she might have done had she walked with Moses upon a hill-top.

"This is love," she told herself, wistfully. "Oh! it's love; I know it is." She looked at him for refutation of the doubt. He had only one answer now for everything. He took her little cold face in his hands and kissed it warm. The kisses stung her; but by this time she was quite sure it must be love! She knew nothing of any joy that did not hurt.

The amazing happiness of James' face, the wonderful way in which he touched her, sent honest thrills through every inch of her. A strange proud courage flooded up in her. She lifted her head, and in a vague way the greatness of her destiny fell upon her like a regal mantle. Her eyes shone steadily as though lit by two pure pale lamps. They shone out upon some world, certainly quite other from the only one of which we have any definite information.

It was this which startled Jock, who at that moment came upon them, towering, round the corner.

"Hullo!" he said, blankly. With one quick glance at her, he shifted his eyes to James. "Hullo!" he repeated, in another voice, and with another face. "So you're the sinner, then," he said, after the pause of a second. "Do you know that she's missed two out of my three dances? However, Miss Anstiss, you'll have to make them up to me—presently."

He turned precipitately, and was out of their sight in a second.

But he had done a good deal in the time. His voice had stabbed Joyce out of her vision of reverence; she was back upon earth again—dazed and panting. And now she knew vaguely what love was; she knew vaguely that she herself loved; she knew vaguely that a marvelous and mysterious thing had happened to her, and that it was *Jock* Hallowes who had brought this strange thing to pass.

With a face torn with a new tenderness, and with a new anguish, she turned to James, to try to tell him. He held her under the great shadow of a flowering oleander and kissed her and looked at her, and kissed, and looked, and kissed again. And this first sight of a strong man's passion choked the words in her throat. A great fear quivered in her eyes, whole generations of women, who have surrendered panting, some in terror, some in blind faith, some against their will, some joyously, but all confused, pressed down upon her, silencing.

When James released her, she tottered and sighed, and in his sorrow and shame because of his brutal strength, again did his infinite gentleness overpower her prompting of truth.

That, and the aching pride of an untried creature who has bestowed her love upon one who never has asked for it, who as a matter of fact was not in a position to be able to afford it!

Jock never came to claim his dances, and soon they all went home—a silent party.

Mrs. Hallowes had been to her first ball, and that held

her silent. James was wrapt in an ecstasy of pure delight. Jock felt blank with dismay. And Joyce in her corner was mute with perplexed anguish.

Knowing in her woman's way, directly she could put old memories out of her mind, that some great thing was astir in the girl's heart, Mrs. Hallowes went up to her room with her. When they got out of the vague whiteness into the red firelight, she put out her hand and rested it on the cold little shoulder.

"It's been a perfect night for you, dear," she said, anxiously. "It's been as good as your thoughts of it, hasn't it?"

"It's been—oh! Mrs. Hallowes, please may I tell you to-morrow?"

"My little girl! My dear little girl, must I go?"

"I'll tell you to-morrow," Joyce whispered.

"Oh! my dear, I'll not say one word to you, but I'll unfasten your dress."

As Cecilia touched the little passive figure, a fantastic sorrowful thought took sudden possession of her. She felt as though she was touching her own old self, and that she had just died.

Joyce looked up, and looked down again.

Words hurts her like stabs, and how could she speak out to Jock's mother? If she spoke now, she must tell the truth, and in an hour she had grown afraid of truth.

With a sudden impulse she threw her arms round the old lady's neck, and kissed her in a way in which she had never before kissed any human creature.

CHAPTER XXVI.

JOYCE huddled down in her bed, her body cold, her eyes burning. She could neither think nor reason nor cry. All she could do was to suffer blindly and shudder away from the morning and amused congratulations.

When at last, with tearless hot eyes, she fell asleep, she plunged sheer into jocund dreams of Jock, to awake with a start only to stare out into the darkness to see his face, as she had never conceived that face of man could look, just one little inch from hers. She hid her face and, twittering with remorse, fell asleep again, when the dreams, absolutely unchastened, slipped blithely back, and a little cold spot on her cheek where James had kissed her grew hot with the kisses of Jock. And once more she woke to regret bitterly. But by this time so worn out was she with warring emotions that conscience could no longer prick her to life, and so she dreamed on in peace, and awoke with a soft laugh to find the maid with her tea standing over her, rigid with admiration. But when the damsel had gone, her brain all agog with weddings, Joyce remembered James, and forgot her tea.

Perplexity, however, became her. When she opened her door at last, peeped and paused trembling upon the threshold, she looked entirely desirable.

Cecilia stood waiting for her at the head of the stairs, one delicate hand resting on the carved baluster, and there were tears in her eyes.

"So you won't have to tell me after all," she said. "I've been told. I don't think I'll say anything about it. Words would spoil my thoughts. They're beautiful, for they've been inspired by James! I'm not going to call him Mr. Coates any more. I never knew him until this morning. I never did him justice. Little Joyce, you hold a great career in the hollow of your hand. And, thank God! it's not in you to betray a trust!"

The gentle hand which closed upon her wrist seemed to Joyce to be fastening on another handcuff.

There was an expectant hush in the very air.

Two old servants, as they crossed the hall, shot strange glances.

Even in the Squire there was a subtle alteration. When he stood up painfully to greet her, his kind old eyes were full of a new gravity, a worthy dignity.

"I am sincerely glad," said he, bowing beautifully in spite of his agonised foot. "I could only wish that I were fifty years younger and had met you first. 'Love's limits are ample and great,'" added Anthony, his agony notwithstanding, in too expansive a mood not to quote, "'and a spacious walk it hath,' but in this case"—he cast a beneficent glance over his shoulder at James, who with stolid resignation was cutting ham at the sideboard—"not beset with thorns."

"Love is a miracle," thought Joyce, in cold despair. "It's the one miracle. It's—it's being born again, and I think I must be just beginning to die."

"You're being bowed down with congratulations," said Jock's clear, cheerful voice, falling down on her like a little whip. "I shall keep mine until bye and bye. Meanwhile you must eat." He gave her some toast, but he clean forgot the butter, and he never gave her the deferred congratulations. The house beamed quiet joy, however, and Joyce felt as though she were being smothered in roses.

According to his new computation of time, days, hours, years dragged on before James had her to himself at last out in the garden.

The frost had yielded to a soft whiff from the south and the spring quivered everywhere. The air was singing under its breath with it, the heart of James bounding. Every little green shoot pushing up through the brown earth whispered to him of Hope and a mighty Faith. To Joyce they suggested little soft things which the frost would nip.

But she answered him sweetly, with a new gentleness. James looked at her, and held his breath. Time

seemed too short. He wanted eternity in which to be happy with her.

"To be with you in a garden in spring," he said, "is just right."

He had broken off suddenly from a practical explanation of his position, in the course of which unassuming statement Joyce awoke to the fact that to be the wife of a great employer must either be a very fine and noble thing, or else an incredibly mean one.

When he spoke her woman's wits were all astir within her, so quite unconsciously she blushed at his tender words and smiled. Then she turned and looked at his tender face, and it smote her.

There was not one mean little thought in the man. His very weaknesses were girt about with strength. He was sound and sane. He had a great heart—and the right principles. She felt abashed at the thought of the honour he had done her, and abashed at the dishonour rampant in her own heart.

Joyce was always honest, and in a night she had grown womanly.

Again she looked at him. He was looking out across the terraces onto the moor, bordered oddly by a broad stretch of flat park-lands. His face was tender still, to be sure—with a sort of after-glow of tenderness—but it was strangely sad, and he had forgotten her!

Never in all her born days had Joyce felt so small or had James looked so big in her eyes.

At that moment, but for Jock, Joyce would inexorably have loved James.

The hunting blood within her was proud, however, and her little startle in face of this masculine anomaly confronting her, shook her eyes clear of their devotional mist, and she saw James as a Man, a man of considerable practical importance, who could be lonely in spite of her, and sad. Whereupon her heart swelled so big with its first impulse of motherliness that it never grew small again.

The little hard green bud had burst into small cool white leaves which henceforth would be always crying for room.

The next thing that Joyce found out in this odd silence was, that although this quiet, grim man needed no woman to help him to be great, he must—in spite of all the women yet created—he must in the end be great. But unless there was a woman at hand to be with him when he was lonely, to understand his loneliness and to respect it, life for him must be exceeding cold, and the best of him could never see the light.

It was a great destiny for a woman, a noble life.

Joyce sighed, yet even in her misery her spirit mounted. Something, half ecstasy, half anguish, trembled along her nerves.

The next minute every atom of her being melted back to Jock. She looked with other eyes upon the bursting snow-drop spikes. They spoke to her of the beginnings of beauty.

She thought of that day when James had likened Jock's mind to a garden where only good seeds come up; she glowed and thrilled.

And that was Joyce's last conscious traffic with dishonesty. James' face and her vigilant conscience pulled her up sharp. James was a great trust, and how could she betray it!

"But—but—but was there no one else?"

She took an eager step nearer to him and laid her hand on his arm. "Did you ever love any one before?" she asked. It was the first definite sentence since he had asked her to—suddenly he remembered that he had never really asked her to do anything. He had, without any pretence of asking permission, taken bodily possession of her. He laughed aloud at this, and at her question.

"Why do you ask?"

"I—I want to know."

"I don't mind telling you in the least, but the question isn't like you."

"It's not like me, but I'm not like myself. I think you're altering me."

"But I don't want you altered. I like you as you are best."

"You'll like me better as I'm going to be."

They looked at each other, and the eyes of both were full of surprise.

"You didn't mean to say that?" said he, promptly,

She drew her fingers slowly across her eyes and frowned at him. "No. I didn't mean to say it, but—I mean to be it! I mean to be as good as you think me. You'll want more as we go on. I'll have to keep up with your wants."

"You're poles apart, you and Elinor Thorpe, but now you remind me of her. It's the likeness that runs through all good women perhaps."

A startling truth hidden from James crashed that moment into Joyce.

"Mr. Coates," said she, in a small and husky note, "when did you give up loving Mrs. Thorpe?"

"I have never given up loving Mrs. Thorpe." He was laughing. She was not woman enough for that yet, but she made a shift and smiled faintly.

"You know I don't mean that! When did you love her like—this?"

"I never loved her—like this. I loved her like a boy in a dream, years ago; now, I love you like a man quite wide-awake. And the difference—I haven't words to demonstrate it! It wants more than a Radical orator for that!"

"Why?—but, don't!" she cried, Elinor's face rushing up and facing her whitely, "don't, please. Don't tell me."

"Why shouldn't I?" said James, serenely. "There's nothing to tell. If there was, you have the best right to it. Mrs. Thorpe is a remarkable woman, and she was a remarkable girl. I knew her in a hundred phases, and she knew me. She helped me hugely, and I helped her a little. She had a tragic life, a life that it makes a man cold to think any woman should have to live. I was a hard-hearted brute of a boy, but she touched even me. She touched every bit of me"—he paused—"almost every bit of me," he corrected. "I worshipped a heroic ideal in Elinor, and as far as I dared, I loved her. But

she wasn't at all—that sort of girl. She had extraordinarily definite notions of things even then, and could always laugh heroics into mute devotion. If she'd given me a show, I have no doubt I'd have loved her—idiotically, as became my time of life. But she was incredibly proud. She was, I think,” said James, thoughtfully, “rather too proud to be quite human.” Joyce's eyes regarded him gravely. “However, I adored my ideal, and no boy ever set out in life with a better. But for Elinor Thorpe I might have to be confessing now to uglier things than I'd care to have to confess to you. She saved me from a lot. She's a magnificent woman, but I hardly think Herbert Thorpe's the man to make her human,” said James, sublimely.

Joyce looked at him attentively, and it was at this moment that the mawkish humility which in her dealings with the Archangel in James had hitherto veiled half her charms, slid from her, and a pale, wan sense of humor first tinged the virginal white of her speculations permanently.

“Mrs. Thorpe,” said she, as serenely as Elinor herself might have spoken, “is appallingly human.”

“My dear child! Ah! you saw her in the Buttons' cottage. There she would be. Her immense motherhood—” he paused for a second, and for some inexplicable reason he winced inwardly—“comes out directly she touches pain—I am speaking of humanity as applied by a woman to a man.”

“Oh! I see!” Joyce stooped down to pick a little meagre starveling of a snow-drop which, in an odd sort of way, reminded her of herself, but as she stooped there were warm woman's tears in both her eyes. “I'm beginning to know,” she thought, “I'm beginning to know!—I think women ought to be very good to each other.”

“I'm glad you like Elinor,” resumed James, cheerfully.

“I don't like her!” Joyce's eyes fairly blazed.

“But—” James halted and stared, and Joyce laughed faintly.

“She's too—too human for me! Some day I shall like her—when I understand more things. I think I might—

"I might almost love her. Come round by the sweet-brier walk," she said, abruptly.

She had caught a glance of Jock dodging wood pigeons behind the beechwood, and she was not ready for him yet. With a sure intuition, she knew that the next step must rest with her alone. It was for her to hide the truth or to betray it.

And whatever she did she must do at once, and well and finely.

She knew by this time that many of the half-truths of the world, and more of the whole ones, lie hidden away in little winding sheets in women's hearts, waiting in patient hope for peace, waiting, just a few perhaps, for resurrection—somewhere. And one of the lessons of a woman is to learn to deal with these things worthily and erect.

"Was there ever such a garden?" said James. "The tribe of the patriarchs has pleasant methods. No new garden could ever look like this, or smell like it. Our flowers look rich and overfed and gloomy. I wonder if you'll like the orchid house any better than I do? Whatever you feel though, I know you'll look admiring. It's the pride of my mother's heart." He looked at her oddly. "I might make you a lot happier if I weren't stiff with prejudices. I could find a garden somewhere in the heart of the country full of the dreams and gentlenesses of other people's ancestors; yours perhaps. The Squire let me know while you were dressing that you number them in their thousands. But I can't persuade myself that an employer's place isn't—well, anyway, next door to his people."

"You wouldn't dare to say that to Elinor Thorpe," said Joyce, promptly. "You mustn't say it to me. How—how can I ever be big, if you treat me as if I were little?"

Her mossy eyes rested on him courageously; her new dignity was strange and beautiful. It held James silent for a few minutes. He took her hand, wondering at its coldness, and the two wandered idly along the box-edged

paths, James marvelling upon his happiness, Joyce gathering up her resources to meet Jock fitly.

It was a pleasant garden in which to think of happiness; a proud and proper place wherein to meet tragedy mutely, with a smiling face, and in the matter of flowers it was no respecter of persons.

So long as she was gay and glad and perfect in her kind in this old garden, the country maid might lie at the feet of the queen.

Quaint beds of potherbs or blue burrage or crinkled crimson and purple kale sunned themselves in their season, side by side with haughty heads of carnations, and yellow bee-hives lurked everywhere in sunny nooks.

Some old dead Hallows who had loved bees used to lie and watch them as he himself lay dying of a grievous wound, and the Hallows cherished a great kindness for all the dead of their tribe.

A wilderness of roses rollicked down a soft valley to clamber up the opposite slope, and in their time apples from the gnarled veterans that crested the hill fell amongst the roses, and beyond and upon all sides stood the tall, beautiful trees, calm sentinels of a fine and seemly past.

"Shall we come out on the heath?" said Joyce, at last. She knew that they would meet Jock as he came down the hill, and now she was quite ready. They turned from the great clump of lilacs and laburnums which hid the tool-house into a twisted yew path leading to a trellised gate opening sheer upon the heath dotted with pines.

Jock was half-way down the slope; he looked listless and preoccupied, and his eyes were on the ground. The sun danced and leaped amongst the pine shadows. The early larks were pouring their songs in showers from the sky. Joyce's heart gave one great bound, and then it lay still, and all her nerves began to gallop. But she held her head well up and threw all her courage into her face. When Jock looked and saw her she was as red as the dawn and looked warm with delight. "Good Lord!" he thought, with a gasp, "the whole thing's incompre-

hensible. No doubt I'll rejoice in time, but when a girl looks like that it's a grind somehow to feel beside yourself with joy. I wouldn't have given Jim credit for so instantaneous an effect—on any one."

"When we saw you first," said Joyce, with the ease of one who has lived, "you looked depressed. It's having so few things to kill, perhaps?"

Jock flung a look at her, then, without a pause, he followed her lead. "You forget the trout, gasping to be killed! Don't you know that the one secret of a happy life is to be able to change blandly." He propped himself on his gun and looked at her steadily.

"It's a lesson you should teach Jim. Once he's fairly up to his neck in anything, nothing will dig him out. Now, to console myself for the vanished birds, I'm off to tie flies."

"I wonder how many he'll tie?" said James, turning back to look at him skirting along the shrubberies. "There are two hours' irritating work waiting for him in that office, and I happen to know that he'll have to tackle three discontented farmers before luncheon, all half ruined by the crazy methods of his father."

"Oh, well! he can take things lightly."

"He can at any rate look as though he did! I wonder what's up now? There's something wrong with him." Joyce listened, breathless.

"He looked quite happy now," she faltered.

"Oh! that's nothing. I know the fellow so well." He paused to look at her and laugh. "The one thing that astonished me is, that with Jock in the house, I should have had any chance."

"You were in the house also." She broke off short, appalled at the turpitude of the path womanward—an illuminating dispensation seemingly beset by strange pitfalls—but when she saw James' gratified face, she freely forgave herself.

"How nicely you're beginning to say things!" James was suddenly thoughtful. "I believe the shock of finding himself next door to a pauper must have knocked out Jock more than I knew."

"He did not seem to be much—knocked out—last night!" she said, in a steady voice, looking straight ahead of her.

"Well, no! He appeared to be enjoying himself. That's nothing. A man like Jock must have digressions."

"They're part of his secret for a—happy life. On the whole, I am glad that Mr. Jock Hallows didn't happen to choose me—by way of a—a digression. I think it's far more astonishing," she added, hurriedly, "that—that you should have chosen me out of all the others for a—permanency."

"She gave a little shaky laugh.

"I am only just beginning to realise how astonishing it is. How grateful I ought to be. You, with your millions."

"I knew that sort of thing would come in and spoil things," said James, with some ferocity. "Grateful! to me! I'm glad you're not marrying me for my money, naturally! But I should be extremely sorry if you weren't glad I have it. It would show a great want of common-sense on your part. I hope to goodness you're going to enjoy the money as well as do good with it, and for heaven's sake don't get it on your brain. Think of the commonplace convenience of the thing, and all it can do for a man. Think what it's done for me. It's made me know you! My dear child! if I hadn't a penny, I should have been a fourth-rate electrical engineer; I should have been superintending the lighting of this house, and it would have been sheer indecency in you to be seen talking with me here in the garden. Did you ever meet one of these gentlemen at Barham with whom you'd be permitted to foregather save in the way of stern duty, did you?" said he, laughing oddly.

"Nothing could make you the least like one of them!" she panted.

"Kicking against the pricks on £75 a year, in a four-roomed cottage, may bring forth strange things in a man."

"You'd have kicked the pricks down, and you'd never have lived in a four-roomed cottage. You couldn't

breathe—your—your chest is too big—and your heart—and your brain.”

He fetched up sharp and caught her hands.

“Why! little Joyce, I believe you’ll be loving me next.”

Joyce’s face got quite white.

“I—perhaps I love you now. I don’t know—I don’t know. I know nothing. It’s I who’s not human, not Mrs. Thorpe. And if you know things—about me,” she said, jerkily “before I know them myself, it—it will kill me. That’s all. Do you ever make mistakes?” she said, her voice of a sudden steady and sharp.

“Frequently. Why?” She had no answer, only another question.

“You’re sure—absolutely sure—that you’re fairly up to your neck in me?”

“I haven’t a doubt of it.”

“Ah! Why can’t you—change pleasantly, like Mr. Jock Hallows,” she said, drawing in a soft, slow breath.

“Radicals are notoriously as pig-headed as Conservatives. In vital things you’d find Jock stiff enough to move.”

“Vital things!” There was a new note in her voice. “Oh! he hasn’t got to vital things yet in the shape of serious girls—I suppose. He finds mortgages—and—digressions enough for the present.”

“I think you’re growing, little one. But you mustn’t grow sharp. When are you going to call me James?”

“Can I ever?” said she, obviously addressing herself.

“You have been trying it over in the wrong way. Take it quick.”

“How do you mean? Why did you guess things about me?”

“It’s the first time I’ve ever been accused of guessing right about anything connected with a girl.”

“You’re practising on me. Why—why didn’t you practise on Elinor Thorpe? She would never have disappointed you. I think—I think—you’ve lost a great deal.”

“Elinor is eminently sane,” said James, startled, but

practical. "We're half-way to the village; suppose we go to see her?"

"Oh!" she cried, with immense relief. "Will you go, please? I want to—to think it all out."

"We're only just engaged. How can I go to Elinor without you? There's a decency to be observed."

"But I can't go with you until I've been by myself."

"I've known Betty and the others make jokes about love," she said, with incoherent haste, "by the hour. I think it's certainly the most difficult thing I—I've yet—met, and the least laughable."

"Hadn't we better puzzle it out together?"

"That—that would be quite impossible!"

He had seen her in many phases. In this innocent one of thinking aloud she seemed to him even more divine than usual.

"Jock and I are going up directly to the mine. Can't you come with us? We'll be talking coal and iron, and you can think."

"I might think wrong," she murmured, ambiguously.

And in the end Jock and James went together to the mine, while Joyce went to her room alone.

CHAPTER XXVII.

JOYCE apparently had not been thinking wrong, for at luncheon she looked beguiling, and directly it was finished asked James, with touching docility, what he would like to do next.

Possibly Jock's excellent appetite at the meal may have helped insensibly towards this obliging serenity.

James, who since she had left him had been looking somewhat fierce and self-mocking, melted instantly. Being single-minded and sincere, innocence enthralled him, and he liked to watch the budding of potentialities undisturbed.

It had been a hard task to keep lucid during his walk with Jock. He had found himself more than once making astonishing statements in regard to iron, and Jock's indulgent grin hardly helped matters. While the clatter of tongues at luncheon jarred upon the unobtrusive contemplation of immature Perfection, in spite moreover of a proud resolve to keep himself from prying, he was racked to know what precisely had driven the child to her room.

They were now in the drawing-room alone, Mrs. Hallowes being thoughtful to a degree.

With a shy, gracious movement, which touched him unaccountably, Joyce bent towards him and her cheek just brushed his sleeve. Joyce was beginning to grasp the fact that in order to find out about things one must make use of conscientious experiment, and all her instincts were growing gentle.

James wondered what he had ever done to deserve her.

"Won't your mother like to see me?" she said, with bewitching wistfulness.

"Directly you've been inspected by your own people, and I approved, I'll take you to her," he said, with grateful eyes. "I ought to be back—Whew! Talk of

the devil—there they are, Lady Rawson and Miss Betty. It's hardly three o'clock. Was it so blatantly obvious as that?"

"You don't think they guess?"

"I'm convinced they know!"

"Oh, dear!"

"But I didn't take any trouble to conceal anything and—there was nothing specially definite about you! Do you mind? I don't in the least. You give one courage for anything!" He looked at her proudly. "Come!"

Mechanically, with an odd, trapped feeling, she followed him into the hall; then her innate honesty fetched her up sharp. It was not he who compelled her; it was no one; it was an idea—it was—perhaps it was—Love?—she looked at him with anxious hope—wavered and doubted. And yet she was proud that she was loved by such a man!

"When they've finished with us," she said, softly, "we'll go to Elinor Thorpe."

A confused, panting desire to make amends for what she could not imagine was making Joyce delightful.

"Because you want to, or because you think I do?"

"Because we both do," said Joyce.

Lady Rawson was in Mrs. Hallowes' boudoir beaming universal love. Betty smiled unconditional approval, and turned her undivided attention, with more stable purpose in her fine eyes than had as yet glorified them, to Jock. The result of the family effort in arithmetic, consequent upon certain entirely reliable information, had been eminently satisfactory.

The Rawson blood had in its time condoned and overcome a crazy curate; it could well bear the strain of a Radical millionaire. All the way from Brecon Court Lady Rawson had been, so to speak, getting up data for the handling of her new connection.

"The whole thing is delightful," she murmured, expansively, having loosened her grasp upon James' hand, but still holding on to Joyce's; "it's so natural—so right. The same aims, the same ambitions, the same—er—dis-

taste for our—er—purposeless existence, our old-fashioned, leisurely way.” James was pushing an insistent chair towards Joyce. “Joyce could never have settled down amongst us conscientiously; her spirit must have revolted against our—er—limitations. Her intelligence demands breadth. Thank God! she has found her *métier*. To think of what you two may not together accomplish, my dear children! It—it takes away my breath!”

“Don’t take it so hardly as that, Lady Rawson, I beg of you. The money problem will work itself out all right without any particular strain on the constitution. I hope I shall be able to make Joyce happy. That’s, after all, the only puzzle in the business.”

“Who can doubt it! The magnificent responsibility of wealth!”

With so many doubtful ones about, Lady Rawson was loath to desert so definite a point—this entirely unexceptionable point which made the impossible possible. James grinned sympathetic understanding.

“That’s not a happy view to take of it, dear lady. We want Joyce to enjoy her money, not to be appalled by it. It covers a multitude of sins, after all, and makes, in a general sort of way, for the Christian spirit.

“Joyce would like to go and see my mother,” said James, sitting down beside his future Aunt Betty, already simmering with wedding garments, and finding Jock unresponsive, having carried Joyce off to the window seat.

“A most right and natural wish. My dear friend Mrs. Carew knows your mother well.”

“She does. My mother amuses her immensely. Joyce will find my mother a deal more difficult at first than the money; but in the end she’ll be extremely fond of her. Both she and my mother have hearts of gold, and in neither is there any guile. Don’t put yourself out, Lady Rawson,” said James, laughing good-humouredly. “My mother has a power of silence, and on the occasions when you’ll meet her, she’ll be all that you could wish. We’ll get Joyce to dress her; Mrs. Carew’s dressmaker plays marvellous pranks with her just now in the matter

of colours, and naturally I'm helpless in the matter. I'm inclined to think that the lady must clothe my poor mother in all the misfits of the Primrose League."

Lady Rawson laughed feebly.

"How amusing you are, dear Mr. Coates."

"Oh, well! if a man in my condition can amuse by what he says, not by what he does, it's something to be put to his credit, isn't it? Lady Rawson, from what I know of Mr. Anstiss, he's altogether too unpractical to do business with. When things are got a little ship-shape, I'd like to see Sir Harry and get all straight and satisfactory before we bother Mr. Anstiss—with that part."

"A nobleman—in spite of his mother—by divine right," thought the lady, ecstatically. "Who could have anticipated so satisfactory a solution to the little problem there?"

"Sir Harry, my dear friend, will be delighted."

"Awfully good of him! In that case I shall have to ask you to let me carry Joyce off; we're going to have tea with Mrs. Thorpe."

He cast a deprecatory, twinkling glance at Mrs. Hallows' sympathetic and intelligent countenance, and marched off with Joyce.

"He might have been made for the girl!" declared Joyce's aunt; "his masterfulness, her surrender; it's a poem! Really, the young man might be anybody; and with his politics and such a mother! My dear Mrs. Hallows, she's beyond words! and her bonnets!" Lady Rawson closed her eyes mutely. "And yet his absolute ease of manner. The very way in which he spoke of his unspeakable mother was admirable! Great wealth is certainly a civiliser."

"A good heart goes some little way, besides a decent education and a fine reliable sense of humour," said Jock, with a wintry smile.

"My dear boy! You know her. Will Joyce ever be able to stand her?"

"Depends," said Jock, gloomily, "upon how much she cares for James."

"You young people," said Lady Rawson, with some mild disapproval, "are apt to endue love with divine attributes. Love, no doubt, may overcome much in regard to a man. I have yet to learn that it can overcome all things in a mother-in-law. My dear Jock, we're but flesh and blood."

"And conscience, some of us. I daresay Miss Anstiss' conscience may give her a lift in the matter of Mrs. Coates. For myself, without any moral incentive, I like her most awfully."

He strolled off to Betty.

"She feeds them, no doubt," murmured Lady Rawson, "and considering all things, their wine it seems is marvellous. That's everything with men. It won't help poor Joyce much, however. That's one of the drawbacks of being a woman. She can't appreciate half the advantages of a rich marriage until her powers of enjoyment have begun to wane." Lady Rawson cherished a tender affection for all the good things of this world.

"Let's hope," said Cecilia, "that Joyce's appetite and taste may increase and expand rapidly, and in time, perhaps, weigh down the calamitous personality of Mrs. Coates. Meanwhile I agree with Jock; she loves and reverences Mr. Coates; that may help somewhat in balancing matters."

"We can only hope. There's a fly, after all, in every ointment. In common decency, Joyce will have to endure the poor woman until her father returns and we can get her married off safely. Then, of course, she need only see her at intervals," she sighed hugely. "He's an absolutely devoted son, and will expect that—and, after all, Joyce is penniless. If only poor dear Mrs. Coates had died!"

"Perhaps the poor lady would prefer to live."

"They have a very tepid hold on everything, my dear Mrs. Hallowes, these people. However, I feel sure that Joyce, under all circumstances, will behave very nicely. It's a wonderful opening for her; providential really. Left at Barham she might, in time, have lectured."

Here Cecilia bridled. Considering her peculiar tie to Joyce, this was almost an insult to herself.

"Or possibly have married!"

"But who? My dear friend, who?"

"Really! I thought we were all rather respectable."

"My dear Mrs. Hallowes! You above all people should know what we can afford, and what we can't. Have step-mothers no consciences?—or—or is it belated matrimony?" she thought, plaintively.

"That doesn't prevent Joyce being lovely, and youth being young."

"Oh! well; did she need one, which I am thankful to say she no longer does," said the lady, with a magnificent unreserve and a touch of irrelevance, "'why resort to duplicity amongst ourselves?' was the motto of the neighbourhood." Her spirit of carping was an unequalled chaperon. "Dear little prim Joyce never gave me one moment's anxiety, thank God! Dear me, where are Jock and Betty? Ah! no doubt in the stables. It's refreshing to see them together, they're so frank, so leisurely; so one in mind and tastes."

"They are indeed both devoted to horses," said Cecilia, darkly.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JUST two months after Joyce had gone to stay with Mrs. Coates, the fear she knew so well began again to pursue Elinor, and she awoke one day to the fact that the village was growing too small for her, saintliness too poignant, herself too ever-present.

To lose herself and find her courage, it needed more than Herbert and the village needs.

This was a desperate blow to Elinor. She had fought so hard, that in spite of her reason, of her experience, of her doubts, she was beginning to think that perhaps, after all, her great victory had been final and complete, that now she was sane and sound permanently.

In the quiet, half-mocking heroism of her push forward; the slow, plodding, bitter grind of rebuilding; a mental attitude so foreign to her passionate nature, this check at the first shock fairly paralysed Elinor.

For a day or so she hardly moved out of the house. Then she whirled forth and walked and walked until she was faint and footsore, with the result that now the very skirts of sanity were vanishing into the impenetrable darkness.

A confused, mute, shy question in poor Herbert's beautiful clear eyes brought her back to common-sense. She dressed herself carefully for dinner. In her pitiful disorder, she had worn her ugliest clothes and put them on carelessly. But now she brushed her hair until it looked like a cloud of ravelled black and bronze silk, and put on the diamond collar which James had chosen as his belated wedding present, and came down in restored magnificence. She had dressed early, so that they should have a full half hour undisturbed.

"Oh! my dearest!" said Herbert, when he saw her, "you're back again with me. Where have you been? I didn't like to disturb you." She laughed steadily and sat down.

"I rather wish you hadn't asked me. Still it really is quite in your line, so perhaps it's as well you should know. I think I've been—I think I've been—in hell—I go there sometimes. At any rate, I've been down in the midst of all the pain of all the world—quite—quite helpless. I get like that sometimes, and nothing will put me right again but a plunge sheer down into real throbbing human pain, where I can help."

"You do nothing else but help!"

"In a decorative sort of way, I want to help to such a degree that I can feel my own power. I've lost my footing for a minute. I want to convince myself how fundamentally sure-footed I am, that it's only just—just a wobble. If you were a demagogic person, now, Herbert, and would let me write your sermons for a week or so, it would do just as well. But the intensity of your discourses is too calm and ordered. They're not just what I want. They don't rage and rip and throw thunderbolts enough for my state of mind. They don't tear the tears from the eyes of your congregation, and all the secrets out of their souls. That's what I'd like to be at, and I might possibly startle your cure of souls a little. They might get straight waistcoats floating in their amiable brains. Failing this outlet, will you let me go to stay with Mrs. Coates, and listen to the whirr of wheels, and see the blackness of smoke, and muddle about amongst my old people, just for a week, perhaps?"

"Of course you shall go, if you like," said Herbert, his eyes fixed on the curious ominous calm of her face, "but——"

"Didn't I warn you against myself—against marrying a temperament? Really, although you mightn't think it, it's going on as well as can be expected. So you mustn't get disheartened the first time it shows the cloven hoof."

He gazed at her with reverent admiration and immense bewilderment.

"Some day I'll shed the thing—drop it into limbo, and then I shall never want to leave you, certainly not when the chestnuts are in bloom, and the green of the beeches

still young. Just look at it! But, Herbert, temperament's as tenacious as a limb, as an eye! Be thankful, dearest, that you're a healthy-bodied saint. Had your sainthood been complicated with a consumption, as so frequently happens, your temperament might possibly outrival mine. When may I go, dear serene-sainted?" She walked to the window and looked out wistfully. Herbert's eyes hurt her. She could tell them no more than she had told.

"It seems rank stiff-neckedness to go away into ugliness, with all this beauty about," she said brightly, smothering a sigh. When she turned her face again to her husband's her beautiful eyes were soft and sorrowful.

"Sometimes I wonder if it's you I worship," she said, "or the peace that is in you. And yet, dear darling, it would be a real comfort if you'd occasionally furiously rage at nothing and chuck round furniture promiscuously like. Your soul is too glistening white for my mood; it dazzles me."

Here a fiendish impulse to liken his soul to a frosted cake caused Elinor to bite her lips. But once more the simple goodness of Herbert's face righted the balance for this poor tortured mind.

Once again Elinor dared not offend this little child.

"Herbert! you must write to me every day, and tell me how much you miss me. You mustn't skip a day, or leave out a word of the missing. It exhilarates me."

"Unless it might one day chance to bore you, my own."

"It would never bore me. I like to be told that you adore me, that all the days without me are a blank, and the sun cold in the heavens. If we live together for fifty years I shall like to be told all this—beautifully, just the way you tell it. Think of the joy of it when you wear lawn sleeves, and are in a position to shed round censure at rectors! Why can't the folly of romance and the wisdom of marriage travel hand in hand to the end?" she said, with an odd eagerness. "Half the tragedies in life are caused by the man's not speaking

out. He may be adoring his wife frantically, but if she thinks he's adoring his dinner or musing over his last bill—a man's facial expression goes for nothing—how on earth can she feel anything more than tepid? I intend—despite all hindrance—to feel radiant at eighty!”

After a long pause, in which she put a great strain upon herself, she came over to help Herbert in a book he was then writing, and never before in all his helpful life with her had he found her so full of suggestions, so true-thinking and right.

When she stood up at last to go to bed, she drew a deep breath and threw her arms back over her head.

“Herbert,” she said, “there are more things than that to be said for pain. When I come back I'll write a little treatise myself—don't stare!—for private consumption, dear! There's an extraordinary sort of purifying power in the very touch of other people's pain. I believe it does literally wash away sin. A hell where we might all be healing each other's hearts would suit us all very well just now in these throbbing times.”

“Your theology, my dearest, seems involved.”

“Because I feel after it, not reason for it. Feelers can go on occasion anyway as deep as some of the philosophies, which isn't saying, after all, very much for them! Oh! I'll figure it all out decently, dear, some day, and then you'll have to embody it in a sermon, and I'll sit and take notes upon the faces of the congregation. You can do it some birthday for a treat for me.” She paused to reflect upon him. “You've never sinned, dear. Until you have, you'll never make sin sting properly. If only you'd look through my eyes at some things, oh! well, you'd considerably startle some people! You—you haven't the divine intuition of a woman!” she said, answering his eyes. “Oh! what a lot of things I'll have to see to at Mrs. Coates',” she said, turning sharp off from her subject. “I must dig definitely into this mystifying Joyce.”

“Mystifying! I'd been led to suppose her simpler than a primrose.”

“Herbert! she's convoluted! But I'll clear her up in

time. I strongly suspect somehow that Mr. Jock Hallows has had a facer—with complications! I wonder if his abominable habit of thinking he can get what he wants without hurrying himself might possibly have tripped him up, and I'm absolutely certain his little step-mother is seriously disappointed at the really sublime solution to the poor little pauper problem. I verily believe she'd have been better pleased to see that great Jock defying fate and marrying Joyce. In a commercial age, too, a poverty-stricken neighbourhood, and the dawn of the twentieth century! Sentiment dead, indeed! It's fairly raging, and that bewildering likeness between the woman and the girl has done all the mischief, brought all this complexity into an unperplexed land! Mrs. Hallows is just living in Joyce. She danced in her through all those amazing lessons; she went to her first dance in her, and now, since she passionately adores her step-son, she'd give her eyes to marry him—in the person of Joyce."

"There might be a confusion, not specified in the Prayer Book, in the union, but it's all extremely refreshing!"

"I sincerely hope that it may refresh James Coates; that's all! Good-night!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

"YOU'VE done one good thing, at least," said Elinor, dryly, when at last she got Joyce to herself, about an hour after her arrival at Hurley Grange. "You've made James selfish. His one thought used to be how he could possibly make you happy, now his only thought is how divinely happy you can make him!"

"You know perfectly well that James couldn't be selfish!"

"I'm extremely glad to know that he can! and for goodness' sake keep on permitting him to be selfish. In order to obtain a perfect balance, never load up the man's side of the scale with too many of your own virtues, else they'll cease to surprise him in you; they'll seem commonplace—no more than his due. He'll grow too exacting."

"If—if you were any one else," said Joyce, with sudden vehemence, "sometimes I think I could hate you! I don't even understand how any one can say things like that about James."

"There's a good deal of devil and some God in every man. Until a girl recognises the devil in a man and faces him fairly, she'll never love him—except in sections."

"How—how dare you? I—I love him—I do love him—I——"

"You love him with your understanding loyally, persistently, while your conscience adores him. That's just another reason why you should keep him selfish; selfishness blinds more or less. James is just now too taken up with his own sensations to be hypercritical about yours. His own thrills keep him going, his own happiness keeps him warm. Meanwhile he rounds you off in a dream."

"You to speak like that! when I thought you—you'd help me——"

"Help you to love James Coates. My dear child, there's too much conscience for me in this little affair."

"You don't know! you don't know! You don't understand!"

"Very likely not. It's too subtle altogether. But don't let James see too clear, else he'll find the love of a peculiarly ethical intellect only half made unsatisfying."

In the sudden pain in Joyce's eyes there was something very like passion. Elinor whisked away and tried not to think of it, but at some bidding, which sooner or later she always obeyed, she turned again to the girl and her face had grown gentler.

"Instead of telling you all this, I should be telling you that you are grown lovely. You look as though you were getting ready to love. I don't wonder that James is proud of you, and that you confuse him. He's making you," she said, triumphantly, "or something is. We won't be censorious and pry too closely for causes. Whatever's going on, Nature has a hand in it. But Nature's a cruel jade!" said Elinor, with sudden sharpness, her face cruel, her voice harsh. She pulled herself up, however, and paused for a minute or two.

"Oh, well! let's come down," she said. They had been standing in Joyce's room looking out at the gorgeous flower-beds, the great riot of glittering glass roofs, the vivid plush-like lawns, the dreadful observatory crowning a bland green hillock. Joyce never ventured near this window when she was alone, and she avoided the garden. It made her ache for thinking of the old garden at Faldeholm and other things best forgotten.

"Oh! Mrs. Thorpe, she—Mrs. Coates is afraid of me!" Joyce said suddenly, flushing miserably, her pride all slipping away. "It's simply awful. Will you help me in that, at least? Oh! her face when she saw you! It was like a sigh of relief! When I'm gone she'll take her stays off and sit in her dressing-gown for a week!"

"She's kneeling to you, don't you see? and her worshipping knees have grown stiff. I can quite understand the poor lady being glad to take off her stays," said Elinor, serenely.

"Just begin to love James and you'll feel quite at home with her, while she'll feel ecstatic in her tightest gown."

"You know——"

"I know that you do your best. You're scrupulously industrious!"

"How cruel you can be."

"There ought really to be no difficulty. In character of prospective mother-in-law she's absolutely original. She's humble and biddable and the least interfering of mortals."

"You make me atrocious! you make me a snob! She—she keeps me awake at night."

"I think we'd better go down. Mrs. Coates' tea cakes are the best in the whole world, and she can't bear them to get cold."

"You're training Joyce very badly," said Elinor, sitting down beside the magnificent tray. "Why don't you make her pour out the tea? You always made me."

"Ah! my dear, you were always such a homely girl, and you knew the ways of the house. She's a little strange yet, and shy-like, and I don't know as James would like to see her doing—common things." She turned a rapturous but somewhat alarmed gaze upon Joyce talking steadily to her son. "I'd hardly like it myself. My dear, I miss you sadly; you don't know the comfort it was to have you to choose my 'close.'"

"Just as I thought," said Elinor to herself, "an idol on a perch. I can't myself grasp that sort of a Circe; she doesn't touch me. I'd give anything to box her ears, and yet there's something about her that would make you quite mawkishly merciful, if you only let it."

She stood up laughing, took hold of Mrs. Coates' shoulders, and put her down in a big chair.

"Now you can be free to look at James' beloved, and I'll make the tea, and to-morrow before you go out I'll alter that last morning-gown of yours and pick your bonnet to pieces. It's a dreadful bonnet. I have no patience with Joyce. She ought not to let you wear feathers put in like those."

"Oh! my dear," sighed the lady. "She's that respectful! It will be like old times to have you go through me. Look at James! he's wrapped up in her and the new Institoot, and she's just as took up with it—to please him, no doubt. She might be a mouse for gentleness. But she's never idle. If it's not that, it's something else. It's surprising when one thinks of her breed. It fairly makes you hot. She hasn't the figure for it. The Honourable Mrs. Carew says as any lady that respects herself ought to lie down an hour a day. I don't go as far as that, but I do like to see a young lady as can idle at proper times. My dear, when you weren't in the thick of work, you were about the idlest lass I ever come across, and look at your figure! and the way you enjoyed your victuals. It was a pleasure to look at you!" She glanced sorrowfully at Joyce talking Institute eagerly, her cakes cold on her plate. "Here, Elinor, my dear, do help yourself."

She pulled forward a little silver concern on wheels in which the cakes sat snugly in a little nest of hot air. "James had it rigged up for me. He knows I can't do with cold cakes. Did you ever know James to forget anything, my dear?"

"Never!" said Elinor, at great personal inconvenience steadily eating cakes, for in her miserable state all food now was abhorrent to her.

"It's a pleasure to have things nice for some one," said Mrs. Coates, desolately. "Poor James now, no matter what you give him—and I have a Frenchman in the kitchen—Mrs. Carew says he's an artist—he might, if you'll believe me, be eating hash."

"Elinor!" she pursued, in an ominous undertone, "you're well in with the county now and know what's what, what goes down with 'em, and what don't! Couldn't you persuade the poor little thing to think better of it and believe a bit in God?"

"But Joyce never told you that she didn't believe in God!"

"Mercy me! No! she's too polite. She comes to church like a lamb, but Mrs. Carew says she knows it for

a fact, and that, and being a Radical into the bargain, will fairly finish her." She looked round furtively. "I sometimes wish, my dear, that James could have seen his way to marry into the Primrose League. To think of the mother of James' children without a God in the world!"

Elinor patted her hand reassuringly. "Never mind," she said; "James' child will teach her all that better than either priest or preachment or even the Primrose League could ever do."

"The coming of a child, and never a word of prayer in your heart! It's against nature!"

"The coming of a child does strange and wonderful things. Can't you wait?"

"It's ill waiting—out in the cold," said the woman sadly, "and I'm a bad hand at guessing. It isn't one's son one can fash with questions, and——"

"So far Joyce has nothing that she can tell any one. Her feelings aren't distinct enough for words."

"There was always plain speaking between you and me!"

"I didn't count. You could take me at your leisure." Elinor spoke slowly and her eyes were dark and dim. "I didn't fill all the future for you and James."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Coates, dubiously, with an affectionate stare.

"I didn't reckon somehow that James 'ed do his courting here," she resumed presently. "The way you're improved, my dear! High-class society has done a deal for you. It didn't happen to be borne in on me then—but now I wonder—it seems fairly odd as James didn't fancy you."

"He was too used to me! You fed and clothed me more or less. What would the Primrose League and Mrs. Carew have thought?"

"Drat 'em both!" exclaimed the lady, with sudden and unregenerate vehemence.

"I haven't the slightest objection. James says you consult Mrs. Carew about your things since you lost me, and that bonnet shows just what she is."

Mrs. Coates was peeping anxious apology at Joyce round the silver kettle.

"You don't know what it is, dear, to be able to speak out plain."

"Oh! don't I know? It's like getting up on the hill out of the town on an August day. I shall be staying with you a whole week, and if you like, you can come to my room and swear! We'll swear together. I feel just like it myself often; it's county society, perhaps."

"My dear, it becomes you. Anyway, you look—Oh! well, I won't say; but I always did think that you might have looked higher than a curate."

"A curate may be a bishop some day."

"Well, now! but I wouldn't be surprised, with you behind him."

Elinor had found out now all that she wanted to know, so she threw up at last her struggle with her consuming agony of restlessness and went across to the adorer and his object.

At the sight of her James' face grew bright with the regal pride of possession, while Joyce's eyes shot out pathetic relief. But presently, when all three went down together to the great factory, Elinor began to understand better how a man of big passions could be so utterly enthralled by this small creature, presumably with none. She began likewise to grasp more clearly the weird working of the girl's mind. She could see, when she schooled herself to patience, that the nervous adoration of Mrs. Coates made Joyce shrivel back to herself; that she was far too much of a little starveling to take the lead in spontaneity with any one; and besides, a horrifying doubt kept her always at arm's length from the poor lady—the same doubt which chased her from dawn and held her sleepless each night, until the sheer youth in her revolted at last and sleep would drop down and shut perforce her dry, strained eyes. And every hour she spent with James made this doubt only the more bewildering, for it increased and strengthened her adoring affection for him. Her courage soared as she beheld him in his daily life at home and

abroad. At every turn she saw tokens of his kindness, his patience, his rectitude, his mighty tolerance, his uncriticising compassion, his immovable will. All the ambitions of Joyce expanded; a thousand new tender-nesses awoke in her. Loosed from the bonds of a starved youth, insight and a great compassion sprang up in her, throbbing; she was consumed, in short, by a passionless passion for James.

After her momentary shrinking back at the dreaded and desired presence of Elinor, all this showed in her eyes, her mouth, her gestures, and all her acts, and James saw only the beauty of her devotion, and his heart sang psalms. He perceived likewise the nebulous passion, marvelled at its incompleteness, and, although reverently grateful, he refrained from prying.

In common with other men, it was his vague belief, that although God has undoubtedly made all the rest of a woman, this matter has from everlasting been given into his hands. In this he filches divine power and brooks no interference, for he knows himself to be the only sure potter.

Thus, before the day was done, even Elinor found herself being astonished by this bewildering new Circe.

When James left them to attend to some business, the girls also left the factory to go down amongst Elinor's old friends in the lanes, and even in the pain and pleasure and excitement of her welcome, Elinor was forced to forget herself and look at Joyce, so sweet she was, so gentle, so gay.

"But, Joyce," she said, when at last they turned towards home, "I thought they terrified you and made you hopeless?"

"They used to. But—can't you see, I couldn't be terrified or hopeless with James here among them. You had—you had the same sort of thing yourself—and look what you are!"

"If you go on like this," said Elinor in the oddest voice, "I'll be telling you next just exactly what I am!"

They came upon a great crowd of children, who at once absorbed all their attention. Elinor had known the older

ones, and Joyce knew them all, and before she left them she was laughing and blithe.

"James has done everything for you!" said Elinor, turning on her fiercely, her nostrils rising and falling in her passionate way. "He's made you! If you don't love him like a woman, you're a brute, that's all! He can't do without you—now. When he left Faldeholm he could quite easily. His brain is full of the future, and he had me to fall back on when he was so tired that he simply must rest! But now, you have him body and soul and brain and spirit. He's possessed with you. I—I wish he had never seen you!"

The subject was here cut short by an old acquaintance of Elinor's, also going to the Lodge, who joined them, and held on relentlessly until they reached the house, and so soon as evening fell Elinor had to gather in all her emotions and help herself, and in the morning she arose always tired with the strife. And so the discussion remained always where it was. The arrow had struck home, however, and from henceforth Joyce felt herself more than ever bound hand and foot and body and soul to a deity.

Mrs. Carew dined with them the next evening, and a painful remark on the part of that doughty lady upon the duty of pauper land-owners powerfully impressed the still aching conscience of James' betrothed, besides touching upon her sensitive pride, for Mrs. Carew was also armed with further tidings.

"No doubt you've seen the Rawsons lately, Mrs. Thorpe?" she enquired.

"About a fortnight ago."

"I'm glad to hear that that affair between Betty and young Hallows is now pretty well an established fact. Like so many of these boy and girl open engagements, it cooled off, I'm told, for a year or so. The sublime way in which Lady Rawson has accepted the fact of the necessity of allowing a young man a long tether if eventually you intned to secure him, showed absolute genius. Sir Harry, of course, accepts what he's told, and is wonderfully obedient; but any one who's fool enough to

judge Alicia Rawson by the cut of her skirts, will find herself considerably out of it. It's often the way with the remote county. Their gowns are a pose, but that sort of thing never deceived me, thank Heaven, and never will; and since they couldn't use up that windfall from the old manufacturing cousin on Brecon Park—hard it should go to that nephew!—Lady Rawson always meant it should go to strengthen Faldeholm. They're local to a degree, these people, and must always oblige a neighbour. 'Charity begins at home,' is their motto, seemingly. Well, charity couldn't be better employed," said the lady, joyously devouring her entrée. "Unless Betty comes to the rescue, Faldeholm will be in the market in three years."

"I hardly think it will," said James, serenely. "Jock Hallowes will pull through all right."

"Oh! that ridiculous iron and coal, you mean! There was a scientific man down at Brecon Court the other day, and he says they're both fudge. I fear Betty is the poor boy's only loophole of escape."

"Have one of these peaches?" said James, amicably.

It was pleasanter to feed Mrs. Carew than to attempt to interfere with her points of view. Being with Joyce was insensibly leading James up to the blander outlook. At that moment likewise he was surprised by a look about Elinor's mouth and eyes which for the first time told him why she had come. He felt gravely annoyed that in his own happiness he could possibly have forgotten Elinor's pain.

CHAPTER XXX.

MR. ANSTISS had returned at last, more sad than of old. His liver, it is true, had ceased to torment, but the dulness of life preyed ravagingly upon him. For the first time in his life he had lived, unhampered by the sense of his inequality, under brilliant skies and amidst light hearts; he had broken away from the dull depression of himself and his environments.

Because of the faint taste of pleasure in his mouth grown a little more human, he found it hard to lay his nose down again patiently upon the grindstone. And the unresponsive faces of his parishioners pricked at his heart, hustled, faltering, from a retirement of forty years.

It was therefore a melancholy countenance, a lean, cadaverous length and a pathetic black bag that, just as the train was moving off, jerked themselves out of a third-class carriage to greet Joyce's expectant eyes. Involuntarily, she shrank nearer to James and caught his sleeve. This touched James. The whole of the child's starved youth trembled up before him. His reception of his future father-in-law was therefore considerably tinged with Joyce, and profoundly astonished this unexpected gentleman.

He had accepted the fact of a millionaire son-in-law with resignation. Neither the Classics nor the Scriptures spoke flatteringly of riches, and his personal experience, although limited, awoke doubt. He had in his time met two millionaires, one at home, the other abroad.

The first, before attending to the business in hand had eaten voraciously from off gold plate, the vicar meanwhile sitting hungry at the window. And in order to save time and get things off his mind, he had, mostly with his mouth full, told him frankly what he thought of the manners and customs of priests.

The other had flourished a comic opera lady in the

teeth of a decorous society, and when not otherwise engaged used to teach boys to gamble.

In any case marriage seemed to Mr. Anstiss a quite unnecessary and uncalled-for discipline. In the case of a virtuous young person with some intelligence, a waste of time and opportunity.

After a day with James the resignation of Mr. Anstiss expanded to placid content. He rummaged "Horace" out of his coat-tail pocket, forgave James his possessions, and clean forgot Joyce.

With the bewildering circumstance they call Love in her road, she would no doubt have grown careless in regard to her quantities, and there was no imminent parish need tugging at his sense of duty wherein she might avail.

Joyce had been longing to see her father. Why, it would have been difficult to explain. The Reverend Clement Anstiss was hardly the person to help a girl in the solution of any sentimental problem. And yet he was the nearest belonging she had. So one day, in much the same mood in which she had gone to another room of books of far other aspect, she went to him. She found him in hot discussion with James, his thin white hands shivering with excitement, spread out with a jealous voracity over four open yellowing pages. He started slightly at sight of her, frowned irritably—in all important matters she was now a mere interruption—and pursued his theme.

It was clear to Joyce that she must find out the right way quite by herself. So she turned and went back to her room to think. Elinor sent her very thoughts shivering back into her heart. Mrs. Coates held her mute and humble. Between her and Mrs. Hallowes loomed Jock. There was no one else. She was absolutely alone. For to the best of her belief, she had no God.

She continued, therefore, diligently to try to love and faithfully to prepare herself to meet fitly her great destiny.

Meanwhile James grew daily in grace, graciousness and a fine courtesy. He seemed to be ascending to

some higher level of character, and he fairly poured pearls upon Joyce, but so gently that she could always forget the magnificence of the act in the manner of it. The pearls, oddly enough, although of the finest, but served to increase her reverential attachment for the man; for no matter what James' gifts might be, never did one of them strike her in the light of an additional shackle; so strong a hold had the absolute truth and simplicity inherent in James seized upon her own truthful heart.

The voices of her relatives, who from time to time plumped down upon her to watch proceedings, view Mrs. Coates and offer up incense on the shrine of the pearls, rang with all the tones of the dulcimer and the harp.

Joyce was beginning to know what being the wife of a man of great wealth might mean. And the higher soared her prospects, the lower fell her ridiculous heart.

She was getting everything, and any return she could hope to offer must be incredibly mean.

It was vague but half-defined knowledge that was turning the poor little comedy of Joyce into cold, depressing tragedy. She could guess now what love meant, and every day was adding wings to her intuition concerning this great matter.

Minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day the heart of Joyce swelled and grew, the pathos deepened in her eyes, the tenderness about her mouth. While, in spite of grief, by sheer force of the fight of nature within her, her slim little body grew round, the delicate pink in her cheeks flushed rose.

Elinor, who had gone home, saner, sounder, and a little sadder perhaps than she had come, could not help but come again to judge of things with eyes less strained inwards than then they had been. And even she failed to grasp the source of the miracle at work in the girl.

It wasn't James! Of that she felt wholly confident.

One day she was giving an eager account of a fishing expedition in which she and Herbert and Jock Hallows had had royal sport.

"I'll be eternally grateful to you, James," she called

out after James, who was just leaving the room, "for having taught me to throw a fly!" Then, with a sudden laugh, she turned to Joyce. "But oughtn't I to be apologising to you? You'll be disapproving of us all horribly."

Joyce hesitated oddly, and, to Elinor's astonishment, there were tears shrinking away behind her black lashes.

"I know so little of anything—I—I don't think it's worth while disapproving of things—noisily—until you have learnt a little more about them yourself."

Mrs. Coates screwed herself round in her chair labouriously. She not infrequently found a difficulty in the free use of her limbs and body in Madame's new confections until, by lusty breaths, shrewd sighs and the shedding of a moiety of the encompassing whalebone, she had broken them into the limits of her endurance.

"If you know enough for James, my dear, you'll do," said her prospective mother-in-law as heartily as she might have spoken to Elinor. James never could abide a fool. She's a lamb at heart, that child, if only you could fathom her," sighed the poor lady, when presently James swooped back upon them and was gone again with his bewildering betrothed.

Mr. Anstiss being passive and biddable, the wedding was to be at Brecon Court.

Joyce's marriage was now becoming remotely connected in his mind with divine and uninterrupted plunges into James' library. And, moved by certain old memories, a flutter was sent forth trembling through the dry bones of his emotions very much like that which smote them when haply he might come upon a dead flower pressed by dead hands and laid to rest within the leaves of an ancient tomb. Upon a curious impulse he presented the obliging book-owner who was about to add his daughter to the catalogue of his effects with a wonderful old edition of *Volpone*, which indeed, had he perused it in the right spirit, might have been instrumental in teaching himself a little human sense.

He unearthed likewise an old dressing-case which had

once been his wife's, and without a glance at its contents he made it over, without comment, to Joyce.

It held a few trinkets, some yellowing letters, a little bunch of dead heartsease, and a faded photograph of Dunstan of the Blues, laid face to face with one of her mother's. Her mouth was blithe and laughing; she wore silken attire, cut low, and a frivolous fringe.

When Joyce came upon these things she trembled. "Was *she* trying, too—trying all these years in the yellow smoke? only to fail after all."

She was now at Brecon Park, and Mrs. Hallows was tapping at that moment at the door. She put the photographs in her pocket, and over the other trinkets the two strengthened their odd friendship and parted in the hall, each with a dim, unexpressed, inexpressible and entirely reprehensible regret in her heart.

Jock, it seems, was taking his position seriously and working horse-power, learning his trade from his manager as though he were a paid apprentice, making friends amongst his men, and winning their unwilling minds victoriously to all his ends.

He was too consumed with work to appear even when James came. James was obliged to hunt him up in his coal-mine.

Betty was surprised at Jock. She used to think that he had rather admired poor little Joyce in her raw state. But when one evening Jock had promised to come, and Joyce came down in white and pearls, Betty felt distinctly glad that at the last moment a rejected suitor had to be beaten up in order to fill Jock's place at dinner.

In the last few months Betty had insensibly been altering the focus of her sensations, and Jock's easy ways were apt to mislead girls as to his native stubbornness and the precise condition of his private emotions.

While in the manner of his regretting, Jock was pure English, and James his best friend.

When, however, later in the evening Jock did appear unexpectedly to consult James upon some sudden danger which threatened his mine, he behaved admirably, yet Betty, now more or less genuinely in love—after the

fashion of her kind—was struck by the momentary muteness that fell upon Jock, together with a quick stretching out of soft black pupils upon the part of Joyce.

Betty, who had gotten to the piano, sat down, threw out her shoulders, upreared her milk-white throat, and the fine, mellow mezzo-soprano which presently issued from it contained an odd, pathetic protest.

It struck even Jock that Betty's voice was considerably more fetching than it used to be.

A somewhat urgent message took James over early the next morning to the mine, and since he sent word that he should not return for luncheon, Betty began to feel restless. The house with no man at all in it was dull, and an odd reluctant hankering to see Jock and Joyce once more together suggested to her that a combined raid upon the mine might hold possibilities. Joyce, having no reasonable objection to offer, went obediently to put on her hat.

The sun hung lurid in a sulky sky; the calm in the air vibrated lowering; everything seemed to hold a dull threat. No breeze stirred, but odd, heavy sighs broke from the strangled air to whirl up wisps of flower dust, which fell back faint, defeated by the sullen weight of air.

A few belated chestnut blossoms dropped like lead; the proud necks of the tulips went slack; the very roses looked as tired as though it had been noon in mid-August; and out in the fields the great marguerite heads drooped sleepily. Even the stalwart Betty paused at the foot of the first rise.

"The game isn't worth the candle," she murmured, sinking down amongst the daisies; "let's drive."

With that her quick eyes raked the horizon, and a gardener's lad, straying back from the village with a parcel of seed, finally carried her orders to the stables.

Joyce was all the time shrinking from this excursion. The hushed, warm air amidst the grass and flowers was full of a subtle fragrance; the composure of the brown earth, with yet all the fulness of pain hidden within the heart of it, suited her mood. The thought of Jock and

James, together with Betty to take observations, appalled her.

But Betty was bent on the jaunt, and she could not be flagrantly disobliging. She arose, therefore, so soon as the pony carriage hove in sight, and prepared to take her place and to think of Sunday, when her banns would be put up.

Betty was discussing bridesmaids' dresses across her shoulder with her sister who sat on the back seat. A busy jingle of marriage bells lightened the dead air, and Joyce's reflections forged on undisturbed.

Suddenly Betty brought the ponies up with a jerk.

"I say, Mrs. Thorpe," she called out in her clear young voice, "what's up? The village appears to be in quite a whirl of emotion."

"There are all sorts of rumours about the coal-mine," said Mrs. Thorpe, gravely, "and some of the women have asked me to go up. But you?—why do you go?" She was looking at Joyce. "It's probably nothing of any importance."

"At least it will give us something to do," said Betty, excitedly. "Make room for Mrs. Thorpe, Mab—do! It's wonderful how a girl of your size can spread herself out!"

Elinor wished her escort safe at home, but since protest was unavailing, and the day dreadful, she was glad enough of the lift.

For a minute or so Joyce was dumb with the sense of great disaster; then she turned to Mrs. Thorpe, her quiet questions sounding dead and inert beside Betty's, which, with a note of new distraction in the spent air, grew cheerful and jocund.

Betty knew nothing of danger, but she adored movement.

Joyce knew well what a big accident meant, and the two men with whose lives her own was bound were in the thick of it.

The manner in which she bore herself compelled Elinor's lagging admiration. Mrs. Thorpe had just then too many definite problems to work out upon her own

account to take kindly to the indefinite ones of an immature mind. But in the next minute, at the sound of a hoarse, ominous note of terror in a shout which fairly fell down upon them through the heavy air, personal considerations were all forgotten, and, with a great leap of the heart, the two women used to great calamities turned and flung questions in each other's white faces.

"Drive quickly, Betty," said Joyce, in a choked voice. But Elinor was already half out of the carriage.

"Come!" she said, on an irresistible impulse of generosity turning to Joyce. "We can run quicker, see, across the field. And, Miss Rawson, for God's sake go home! This will be no place for you."

The coal-mining industry had never been very popular in this agricultural neighbourhood, and although the men were glad enough of the wages, their attitude in regard to the whole business, until Jock had taken them in hand, had been one of amused protest.

The former managers throughout the course of the Squire's experiments had indeed been obliged to import strange labour. It was Jock's popularity alone, when he first announced his intention of reopening the mine, that made the men in the neighbourhood roll up. Consequently the white faces of the women who flocked up the hill, child-laden and panting, were all of the village.

It was an odd, bewildered, awe-stricken crowd, strangely unlike the crowd which flocks, full of grinding knowledge, to the pit's mouth in a colliery district.

Here there were as yet no thin shrieks of the women who know; no stony faces of those old men who in their day have walked, year in, year out, hand in hand with death; no shrill wailing of the children whose ears since they had ears to hear have drunk in stories of the horrors of the dark.

Those running scared towards the hill-top were white and breathless, and the vague, ignorant enquiry in their wide, mute, patient eyes made Elinor, after her fashion, and Joyce after hers, shrink away trembling from the cruelty of the bountiful hand of God.

They knew so little of the terror of possibilities, these subdued creatures, unused to events, absolutely incapable of coping with them.

"Oh! their faces," cried Joyce, with a sob in her throat. "They don't know! they don't know! how helpless it makes one. Ah!——"

Now they were only a few hundred feet from the pit's mouth. There was a clank of chains, a low murmur, a little perfunctory hum, and two steady white men's faces smiling strangely at the two girls. And with another creak of iron they were gone.

"Both!" said Elinor. "And there's Mrs. Hallowes. What is the danger? Oh! Tell us!"

"Some props given in and eleven men imprisoned with the manager, and the gas gathering."

She was as composed and unruffled as usual, but with a face like death.

"Oh! my little girl," she said, turning to Joyce. "It wasn't Jock's fault. He did his best, but James would go."

"Of course he would," said Joyce faintly, her head like a queen, and at that moment she came quite near to loving James Coates.

"If anything can be done, they'll do it," said Elinor, in a clear, far-reaching voice, her eyes blazing. She turned them swiftly on the old woman and the young, and one little sob for herself and for them arose and broke from her in a groan.

"Oh! you poor women," she whispered. Then she set her face hard and turned to that other group, which now, sheer in the face of the horror of the might-be, was wailing despairingly on a low note, which, with a fearful insistence, rose, held, and filled the air.

"How long must they be?" she asked of an old miner who had come back to the village where he was born to doddle comfortably to his grave, within sight of the old public house, but whose eyes had been stung back to a brief life by the prick of the old Fear.

"Four props gorn and t'others a'goin. A brave mass to work through, an' the gas to reckon wi' mum, be an hour leastways."

"An hour! and all that's to be done!" said Elinor, so that every woman could hear her. She threw off her light jacket to find Joyce beside her, her eyes black with an agony of dread, mutely waiting for orders.

Of a sudden the curious vagrant spirit of evil which continually pursued her spurred Elinor to a cynical wonder.

"Which of them is she looking like that for?" she thought, with swift, jealous disdain.

"You know as much as I do of these things," she said, in a quick hard tone, "and you have as much courage. You know the danger. James Coates never loved me, but he's inspired me to face many a situation. See if he can't do as much for you!"

Joyce turned sharply, her face a shade whiter, and went proudly in amongst the women, where something inspired her seemingly, for she worked bravely, and the little children clung to her skirts.

The whole village was full of her engagement, and the very fact of her quiet acceptance of the awful risk the man she was to marry in less than a month was running for their sakes gathered in the scattered senses of the women and stilled their shrill wailing. The little lady was too small and young to suffer so silently. The very sight of her frightened noise away.

In an altogether other sort of way Joyce was as effective a presence as Elinor herself.

After a swift glance at her, Elinor lifted herself from a tough task and paused to watch her, her big, generous heart hot with shame.

In her quick impulsive fashion she went over and touched her shoulder.

"Oh! you poor Joyce," she said, "I know I'm a brute, but—but—it's hard for me too!"

"I know it is." Joyce averted her eyes sensitively. "I know. I understand."

"You don't understand! There's nothing to understand!"

"There's a great deal to understand," said Joyce, with great gentleness. "And, oh! Mrs. Thorpe, won't you

let us be sorry for each other—even now? It's the one single thing in the whole world that we know is quite right—to be sorry for each other."

With her eyes still turned away, Joyce fairly ran back to her own work of helping other stricken women to rig up a gate upon which to carry home with as little pain as might be, possibly, the one dearest in all the wide earth to some one in that pallid group.

Mrs. Hallowes, with curious foresight, had brought linen and great pots of wonderful ointments, and Elinor, seeing Betty stupid with terror, and her little sister crying hysterically, had sent them both off in search of the doctor, while three women with husbands safe out on the farms, in their garrulous immunity from disaster, with lurid tales of woe, she had despatched peremptorily to make ready the Cottage Hospital for its first fill.

Minutes drifted and mounted—mounted until they made an hour, and then Mrs. Hallowes and Joyce lifted themselves simultaneously and drew a deep breath.

"If only one could have gone with him!" said Cecilia, speaking her thoughts aloud, her face drawn with pain.

Something in her eyes forced Joyce to her side. She gripped her arm and suddenly, for one instant, she dropped her face upon it.

"And you can pray!" she said, "and you can pray! Pray for me, too."

"Child! do you think I could leave you out? It's Jock's place; he could do no less," she said, proudly. "But—but it was magnificent of James!"

"I—I'm so glad that you're his mother," said Joyce, stooping again to her work.

It was only later that Mrs. Hallowes fully grasped the odd anomaly in the girl's remark.

The minutes were dragging on again into an hour. The repressed wail rose again from amidst the women, persistent, and their thin hands fell slack in their laps.

In the tense strain one or two irritably slapped the child tugging at her apron. A little whimper made a pitiful second to her sharp, high treble.

Another creature, with sweet vacant eyes, quavered

out feebly, "From Greenland's icy mountains." Where the association lay in her poor distraught mind, were hard to say.

Even the heart of Elinor grew faint in the awful suspense, and then her husband came up, breathless.

"Why wasn't I in time?" he said, turning by force of habit to her—presumably of these sufferers she who had least to suffer.

"You are in time. We couldn't have done one single minute more without you. They said it would be an hour—now it's two. Some one must do something."

He glanced round swiftly at Joyce and Mrs. Hallows. "You can't help these," said Elinor—"nor me," she added, quietly. "Help those others."

"Ah!"

The next second he was at the pit's mouth, hemmed in by the panting crowd, and from far down there ascended a murmur of voices, and then a poor little try for a cheer, and the minute after they could hear the dull gride of the chain against the side.

Mr. Thorpe took off his hat and turned to the swaying crowd.

"All we can do now," he said, "is to ask God to give us strength and patience to suffer and to act. The injured will need all our senses and all our thoughts, and above all, there must be no noise to make bad worse."

The first basketful—a piteous medley of livid, scarred faces and dreadful injured limbs—awoke one long shrill shriek amongst the women unused to horror. That finished, they drew back their breath through their teeth and fell away wildly weeping, and absolutely useless. Save the few who stood stoutly by the three who never faltered. And between them all these did wonders.

The doctors had their hands full, and but for the curate would have been powerless to cope with the calls upon them. But Herbert was a practical saint, and where his people suffered he went briskly with his eyes open.

Then another basketful, and of these some could give coherent information. Five men lay injured, ready to be brought up.

The engineer had been crushed holding up a prop whilst his men ran, but it was the taste of his biting tongue which had driven them, not fear.

And now the master and Mr. Coates had gone forward to the far gallery, where there were still some imprisoned.

To reach these they would have to grope through a long passage choked with after-damp. "A jaunt to death!" the man said, moaning. "But there was no contending." With that the doctor took him in hand, and soon he, too, lay silent.

The hospital beds were full, and others made up hurriedly on the floor held each its groaning burthen.

And some wives were widows, and some children fatherless, and the twilight fell. Yet still no sign or sound of the missing men.

And below somewhere there blazed a fire, and sometimes a weird, haunting rending of the nether-world shook the hearts of those who heard, and now and then a dull thud as of the falling down of a great mass.

Elinor lifted herself at last slowly from a hospital bed, and looked around her. She had seen Joyce, relieved from her watching, creep away some minutes before, and Mrs. Hallowes had been gone a little longer.

"I have no reasonable right to be there at all," she said to herself, "but I'll go, too. James must have some one who can think of him only, and pray for him alone. But—she can't pray! I—think I'm glad." But when she saw Joyce, she threw up her head angrily. "I wonder what I'm made of?" she thought. "Her heart is breaking, and she can't help its folly, and she's behaved amazingly."

The men from all the country-side were now at work, under Thorpe's direction, burrowing with pitiful slowness towards that living grave.

It was too soon to be quite hopeless, so they worked with dogged, fierce concentration. Not a man spoke, not a pipe was lit.

There was no pause, save now and then when a man propped his pick against his knee to wring the trickling, hampering sweat from hair and brow.

And any moment the crust of earth might break in and the seven be multiplied by seven. But it was not of this that the men were thinking.

And then at some sound unheard of the women, every man ceased working and threw himself flat on the ground.

The cheer was choked in their throats while they sprang to their feet to fall to again upon the yielding earth, working like demons. And slowly, slowly, slowly, the opening grew, and at last they stopped short with a great sigh, for the livid hand of a man gleamed white in the torchlight.

He was drawn out safe, then another, and still another, and each woman swooped wildly down upon her own.

At last Jock and James were set side by side, livid and motionless, and then Cecilia for the first time lost her calm and fell upon her knees beside Jock.

"Oh! my son, my own, own son!" she moaned.

Joyce stared, trembled and swayed.

"They're both dead!" she said aloud, in a dull voice, her eyes bright and wild. "What does it matter now?"

Nevertheless, in a last effort of duty to get to James, she shuddered down beside Jock.

CHAPTER XXXI.

IT was a momentary lapse, however. In a trice Joyce was upon her feet again and sane, more or less. Sane enough at least to watch Elinor kneel quietly down and, with held breath, lay her cheek against James' heart; to see Cecilia also on her knees throw up her head with a great sob, and Jock's wide eyes fixed upon herself in vague, groping, amazed enquiry.

"Why?" he murmured, weakly, always looking at her. "It's—it's all right."

Then he sank back into unconsciousness.

The two were betrayed to each other, but to no other soul on earth.

Mrs. Hallowes, full of her own overwhelming joy, thought that, as was only natural, Jock was staring into vacancy. Elinor's heart was standing still, waiting for one breath from James.

Giddy with shame, joy, and a mighty grief, Joyce went to Elinor, and together they knelt, waiting.

But the poison had gone deep into the great frame of James, and there was a bitter hour or so to wear through before any breath of life could be coaxed back into him.

Jock was safe in bed and Cecilia back at the pit's mouth before the insistent wings of death were beaten at last from off poor James.

While the doctors tried artificial respiration till great beads of sweat stood out on their foreheads, Joyce followed Elinor's lead unflinchingly.

There was plenty to be done. The men could not be neglected whilst the masters were being cared for.

Nothing surprised the villagers in Elinor; her power over them was supreme. But the terrible calm of the other slight creature under the incredible strain of that dusk beside the flaming fire of refuse coal, made many a strong man shiver.

Joyce worked like one possessed, and her heart was bursting with a vain effort to pray. For what, she had no notion; she knew only that James must live in order that she might atone—somehow.

At last the faces of the doctors relaxed, their efforts lessened, a hush fell and swam around and about them, and Elinor stood up straight, her eyes ablaze.

"Ah! we've got him," said the old village doctor, with an odd sigh, for he and James had grown to be firm friends.

Joyce dropped a sponge—she had been using it to moisten James' lips with brandy—and took a step back into the darkness. But Elinor sprang after her and took fierce hold of her shoulder.

"You going—you!" she hissed. "You must be there—there where he can see you! It's you he'll want to see first, or he may go back again!"

She thrust Joyce forward into the flame-light, and herself shrank into the gloom.

There was a dreadful wrenching at Joyce's heart, an extraordinary clearing of her brain. She knelt down beside James struggling back to life, and with the tears streaming from her eyes she prayed her first little mute, conscious prayer.

"God help us all," said she, "every one of us, for there's no one else to do it." And then the bloodshot eyes of James peering back into life saw in the red flame-light a woman, softened and chastened, exquisite with a new beauty, sanctified with a new divinity, weeping above him.

While Elinor, her frame torn with dry, noiseless sobs, out amidst the shadows, was crouched, exhausted, against a trolley.

But it was only the merest little flicker of life that had trembled back into James, and he had to fight hard to hold it. He had, however, never yet permitted anything to slip slack through his fingers, and he had no intention of letting his life escape him for the lack of a firm grip.

Life now was a fine game; even in his mortal pain, he longed to be up and at it.

Joyce's face, as he had come from the great darkness, had set a beckoning glory upon his horizon.

His injuries, however, were serious, and needed more than hope and a new outlook to heal them.

He had been propping back a great weight of rending, tottering earth whilst Jock was dragging the poisoned, unconscious men from out the death-trap where they lay sprawling. But just as Jock, dizzy and faint, fell face down with his last burthen, down came the crash, jamming James against a solid bank of coal, fairly wrenching one arm from its socket and leaving him with a bad inward hurt which baffled the doctors.

Moreover, James upset all their calculations, for he appeared to be impervious to drugs, and nothing but absolute rest could ensure his recovery.

Early the next morning Elinor came up. She had been watching all night in the hospital, and her face was white and haggard. But after her strange fashion, whenever she was plunged sheer in the thick of sorrow, her great eyes shone radiant, resolute, and full of a sure and certain hope.

Cecilia had divided her night loyally between Jock and James. Jock, although nothing like so seriously injured as James, yet needed close attention. Mrs. Hallowes was anxious and alarmed.

The restlessness of James was a calamitous complication, ill to cope with, while Joyce, who had entreated to be allowed to remain at Faldeholm, shrinking away outside James' door, made her heart ache.

There was, moreover, a mute and marked depression about Jock which could not be altogether explained by his grief and anxiety for his people's injuries.

It seemed to Cecilia to be a distemper of a more intimate and personal character, and held ominous possibilities.

Elinor's eyes brought a new light into the house, and a new serenity. As a matter of course she followed Mrs. Hallowes into Jock's room, and then into James'.

James smiled up at her faintly, and gave a jerky toss, which did him more harm than all the drugs he had

been gulping down with a wry face could have done good.

She sat down, with gentle touches to his forehead and hair.

"If you don't keep still, James, you'll die," said she. "Every one is getting on beautifully. If you die now, you'll upset things frightfully. I'm going to get Joyce to sit and watch you like a cat."

Mrs. Hallowes, full of old prejudices, gasped slightly. But Elinor laughed down on her softly as she passed.

Outside the door she paused for a second to pick up her courage and get a little warm. She was so piteously cold.

It would have been so easy—so easy to give him up had she been a little more sure of her to whom she was relinquishing him.

Joyce's countenance, if it failed to convince, at least disarmed her.

It was so humble, and so white, and in spite of her waywardness and the womanhood forever aching within her, Elinor had something of a man's outlook.

"You poor little thing," she said, "so they never let you in at all. That was awful. However, Mrs. Hallowes' sense of what's right must yield now to necessity. If James won't give in to drugs, he'll have to give in to you, that's all! he'll have to lie still and look at you. Worshipping you in silence will soon send him to sleep," she added, with an odd, grim twist of her mouth. "Come! I'm glad you're quiet. Betty put her nose into the hospital just now and fled, howling."

Elinor refused to attend to the curious pleading in Joyce's eyes. She had herself to think of, herself to steady. She talked on hurriedly.

"But the men quite liked it. I think it broke the ice, and brought her nearer them, made her more akin to their own sobbing wives. It's only among themselves they can grasp mute affliction."

Elinor was justified of her faith. Joyce proved considerably more efficacious than drugs.

A bundle of tortured nerves, stricken conscience,

aching heart, sincere and patient endeavour, she sat beside the great oaken bedstead, tireless and resolute, her eyes burning with zeal to do right. While James, simple and loving, clung on sleepy and happy to his little, thin girl's hand, and slowly, slowly got well.

Jock meanwhile tossed and tumbled upon his bed. There was no urgent reason why he should not toss, and his system called for no soporifics. So he tossed on unchidden, and wondered how in the name of common-sense he had come to care for the poor little girl in the astounding, confounding, and confounded way he did—how, above all, she had come to care for him—how it would all end!

It would have looked to Jock too much like skulking, considering all he had to do, to let this private and personal matter come between him and his recovery, so while he chewed the bitter cud of his reflections wearily, he yet made all the haste he could to get well.

Besides, as he lay aching and mutinous, he had learned many things in regard to his little step-mother which made it quite impossible for him to disappoint her.

James, with Joyce to look at, beat him, however, by an hour, and to congratulate him on his recovery found the entire Rawson family buzzing in the drawing-room.

Even Sir Harry had got himself hoisted into the carriage and out again, and was ready, beaming, with an elegant selection of anecdotes purely matrimonial, to pour upon the wretched lover.

His wife at once took firm hold of Joyce.

"My dear little girl," she whimpered, in a bubble of relieved emotion, "this brings home to us many things. Who can again refuse to believe in direct answer to prayer? I have prayed, oh! my dear, how I have prayed!"

This was quite true.

By this time the lady had become strongly impregnated with Betty's yearnings to get Joyce well out of the way. The County was aroused, the bridesmaids' dresses under way, the cake ordered.

The situation called for all the exertions at her com-

mand, and Lady Rawson was noted for her fine wholesale methods of doing things.

"Dear little girl," she quavered. "How glad you must be! How thankful! how full of rejoicing! But what a pale little face it is! The banns will be put up next Sunday, dear child, so cheer up."

Joyce's eyes were now fairly starting out of her head.

"In three weeks these white cheeks will have plenty of time to get pink!"

Then Betty swept her off. Finally she found herself—how she came there she never knew—standing before Sir Harry, being pelted with seasonable wit, and presently Anthony, who knew something of "that old fool's methods," hobbled up and, with the amiable view of blotting out the blundering joker, began to quote.

And then the door opened, and Jock, looking rather white and subdued, came in, to be greeted with a shrieking ovation. When it had died off a little Jock looked round and, with a strangely gentle look on his face, was going over to Joyce, when Betty stopped him with a lusty, "I say, Jock." When he had satisfied Betty for the moment, he turned again to Joyce.

But Joyce had fainted.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE incident, even in a robust neighbourhood, was pronounced, under the peculiar circumstances, to be quite excusable, and told no embarrassing truths to any one save Jock.

To James, indeed, it told a host of most innocent lies, thrilled his heart, and set his proud spirit mounting.

Jock that night got a return of his fever, and raved with much vehemence, but a perplexing absence of names.

In any case, there was no one to hear but Cecilia. She pondered many things in her heart, but made no sign.

Lady Rawson came the following day to give advice in a general sort of way, and now that Jock must soon be about again permanently, to carry off Joyce to safer quarters.

Having delivered her testimony concerning many matters, she proceeded to engage James upon the one absorbing topic, with perfunctory and somewhat vindictive excursions into Jock's untoward relapse.

With the banns yet hovering in the balance, and Joyce acquiring hourly a subtle and imperative charm, his fall back for no tangible reason struck her as thoughtless, not to say unneighbourly. Joyce escaped to say good-bye to Mrs. Hallowes, who, having listened courteously to the multifarious instructions of the British Matron by Divine Right, had left the room.

Indeed, just now it was but rarely that the drawing-room at Faldeholm saw Mrs. Hallowes. Joyce found her waiting in the hall. She drew the girl into the library, closed the door softly, and looked quietly into her fearful eyes.

"Little Joyce," she said, "it's the hardest thing in the whole world to—to feel right. In nine cases out of ten, so long as we act right, how we feel is of less moment.

But in the tenth, it makes the whole difference. If—in spite of all your striving, you can't do it, child—go—go and tell James. That will be the true courage and the true loyalty. I—I may not approve. Far from it," said Cecilia, with a prim, dry clearness of tone. "But I think I shall understand. And at least I shall keep silent when the hubbub of protest arises around you. In an odd sort of way you are me—me fifty years ago, in much the same strait. Oh! I tried too, and I failed. I went and told the man I had promised to marry—ignorantly, before I knew—I went and told him honestly just how it was."

She paused and looked curiously at the girl. "And the man for whose sake I went married another girl, and was quite happy. Then that was anguish; now I know that it's only life; and though I still fail to understand it—she had a paltry mind, my dear—I can now rejoice in his joy. And even now"—her eyes shone with a vision of Jock—"even now, my dear, I myself am richly blessed."

Long before she had finished Joyce was as white as paper. She now turned desolately, without any good-bye, and went forth from the room.

"And now," said Cecilia, dropping limply into a chair, "once again in my life I've done quite right, and been a bad mother. In order to be a good mother, it would appear as though a woman must see things obliquely, and act accordingly. It's a strange dispensation, but, oh! to see a girl just about to marry upon a groundwork of conscientious effort. God help all concerned! Ah! Mrs. Thorpe, you always come just at the right moment. Sit down, dear, and talk to me."

"Mr. Hallowes isn't worse, surely?"

"Oh, no! He's much better, else I shouldn't be here. He's beginning to depend on me a good deal," she said, softly, with an ineffable air of pride.

"I should think he had, indeed! Your Jock looks as though he were born to have the best of everything. It would be out of nature if a mother were left out. Now he's found the absolute necessity of one, he'll be

more exacting than if you'd been spoiling him since his birth. How happy you'll be!"

"Happy! but when one knows all the sadness that lies in the path of youth."

"And all the joy!"

"Mrs. Thorpe! Don't you want to have a little child?"

"Oh! No! no! no!" she cried, with a sort of soft vehemence, then she paused to draw in a heavy little breath.

"To be the mother of men is the finest thing in the whole world, and there's never been a real woman yet who, deep down in her heart, hasn't desired this great thing, pitifully. Those others who don't are bits of women—remnants! But from that point of view I'm an outsider—I have no rights in it."

"But——"

"The very first day you ever spoke to me—really I knew that some day I'd be telling you the reason; and some day I shall. But there's plenty of time. There are crowds of imminent things now. I'm used to wait for my turn."

Cecilia looked at her gently, and after a short pause for wonder, and a vague regret, her thoughts sprang back to the inexorable present, and firmly, but seemingly at random, she seized it.

"Even when we've lived, each of us women," said Cecilia, "through each phase, and could find our way in the dark through all the old mazes, and yet with all this knowledge fail to track the windings of a girl's heart, is it, I wonder, so strange, so entirely reprehensible, that having lived through nothing herself, and knowing so little of the road she has to travel, with its sign-posts for the most part written in hieroglyphics, that she herself should sometimes take the wrong turn? Cross-roads, dear Mrs. Thorpe, are confusing."

Elinor received these dark sayings with an odd laugh.

"If a girl starts out to seek her fortune on the bidding of an immature intellect and an overtrained conscience, she's pretty sure to go wrong. They throw distracting light, these things!"

Cecilia shuddered.

"And for the man, oh! think of it."

"I've been thinking of it a great deal."

"But what can we do?"

"We can wait."

"Those baleful banns?" cried Cecilia, with an absence of restraint very unusual with her.

"They're not up yet."

"My dear Mrs. Thorpe!"

"While she sat zealously luring James back to life she had ample time in which to spur her courage and her conscience to the further effort of robbing him of everything that in his present condition he firmly believes alone makes life worth living. She's figured it all out clearly. She has, green as it is, an orderly mind, and between you, you've made the girl grow. I met James just now going over to the Rawsons, his neck stiff with pride, and with the gentlest heart in all the world," she said, with a curious quietness. "And Joyce—she'll be ready for him, and they'll go out together—and—Oh! I've no doubt she'll behave very finely; something's glorified the little prim creature."

"Oh! Mrs. Thorpe, what do you know?"

"Nothing at all, except that I'm quite right!"

"Oh! what does she want? Hasn't she got enough? What more can she want?"

"What she really does want is a fine honest primeval husband who'd beat her as soon as look at her. And here—here she is selecting amongst the best, choosing and rejecting like a queen; that little raw girl! And the county will have a fit, and Lady Rawson apoplexy, and we can only hope that Betty won't box her ears. I should—had I anything but—but vicarious rights in the wretched business. And it's James who's made her—simply made her! What was she when she came here but a little wisp of a grey thistle, every prick agog for an object! James has got grapes from thistles—for another man. It's a little hard, you'll allow; it's not fair play——"

"And yet not one in the game has played unfairly," said Mrs. Hallowes, with spirit.

"I don't say they have. James has thrown the missing number, that's all! And no one but me knows how much he loves her—and—the way in which he will take his grief. Mrs. Hallowes, you know what your Jock is to you. James is all that to me—and just a little more," she added, under her breath. "And two women have discussed two men and one girl," she went on, in her usual voice, "and there are literally millions in it, and yet they haven't mentioned money once! It's a record dialogue!"

"The omission will be amply atoned for upon the part of others," said Cecilia. "Mrs. Thorpe, come and see Jock."

"Ah! There it is, from beginning to end it's all you and your Jock! You're the cause of all the mischief, and yet they call you Saint Cecilia. However, saints are generally at the bottom of all mischief. You brought her here. She's you all over again; that's why I can't hate her in any comfort! Between you, what could you expect? Sentiment, before it's finished its work, will have scandalised the community, played ducks and drakes with the property, and broken a good man's heart. Only that you're bound up in Jock, Mrs. Hallowes, you'd be crying this minute for James!"

"One more word, Mrs. Thorpe, and I'll be crying this minute for—everybody."

"That would be premature," said Elinor, her voice like ice.

"Come, dear," said Cecilia, with unruffled gentleness, "Jock will be thinking himself neglected."

Meanwhile Lady Rawson was gently observing Joyce. The cheeks of this young lady still looked white. She started when addressed; her interest in her clothes was of the slightest.

Her aunt experienced an unaccountable uneasiness. She came the following day into the drawing-room where Joyce sat, obviously waiting, but waiting with what struck the elder lady as an unseemly face.

She had herself important affairs on hand, but she set them aside, took up her knitting, sat down, and plunged forthwith gayly upon the refining influences of decent society and a serious accident as applied to the Radical frame. "His very features have undergone a subtle alteration. He's converted us all, my love, every one of us," she piped, enthusiastically, after a careful resumé of her subject. "Even your uncle's prejudices—and you know what they are!—have surrendered to the dear fellow's—hem—many excellences. There's something quite—er—elevating in the look of that leonine head of his. It certainly struck one at first as big; but now we like it; no alteration would improve it! A man must, after all, consider his peculiar build. James Coates' head belongs to the heroic type. A military cut—like that of Jock Hallowes', for example—would somehow spoil the suggestion."

She paused and looked blandly for her answer.

"Oh!" murmured Joyce, who, strong in her new wisdom, perceived the incongruity in the simile, but felt too meek to be amused.

Lady Rawson surveyed her disapprovingly. Joyce of late had occasionally struck her aunt as being somewhat poor-spirited.

"You will have a great position, Joyce," she pursued, with solemnity. "I wonder if you quite realise this fact. Of course, we must look matters in the face sensibly. There are drawbacks; prejudice is hard to overcome. Under the circumstances, therefore, you may be called upon to assert yourself, to cultivate a more dignified bearing. I shall do my utmost for you. I have already given a hint to Mrs. Carew. But being married from here of course——"

The sentence needed nothing further. Lady Rawson calmly counted her stitches.

Joyce lifted a proud, offended white face.

"To be married to James Coates from anywhere would, I should have thought, be honour enough for any girl."

"A very proper sentiment on your part, my dear,"

said her aunt, dryly. "I'm glad to know that you have some common-sense."

With a diplomatic glint in her eyes, she looked benevolently into the silence, and then, in a lighter strain, began upon other matters. Presently she grew playful.

Lady Rawson was a good woman, and in her way sincere; but she was a mother, with Betty to think of.

"You naughty little puss," she purred; "to go off in this ridiculous hurry! You'd have made such a sweet bridesmaid for our dear Betty! That will be our next great event—Ah! Mr. Coates, you're one of us now, so we'll let you into our little conclave. I have just been scolding Joyce for being in such a hurry. I looked to her, you see, to be Betty's bridesmaid, and here she is claiming bridesmaids on her own account, and leaving poor Betty in the lurch."

This sort of thing invariably confounded James. He blessed Joyce for her precipitate run for her hat, and fell to valiantly upon prize Leghorns. James was a man of manifold information.

"Are you allowed to walk?" said Joyce, quickly, directly she came back. "May you?"

"Up to a mile or so. I'm really equal to Mont Blanc, but I'm not supposed to climb mountains just yet. What is it, little one?" he asked, when they were out on the gravel. "You look to-day as though you needed space, like Elinor. Isn't the garden big enough?"

"The trees are so—so friendly," said Joyce, in an odd voice. "I want to get to them."

In the pause James watched her in silence.

"The spirit of the fields has been working in you now for a long time," he said, at last. "You'd never get on without them; but there's a vast difference between a life amidst woods and fields and—and occasional plunges into them."

Joyce forced her eyes to look at him, her ears to catch his words, but the pulses hammering in her brain and heart made her half blind and very dull of hearing.

"Mere plunges just remind you of all you've missed in the intervals. Still the heart of the country and consecu-

tive peace isn't for the like of us. I'd been arranging a little surprise for you—for afterwards, but I think I'll tell you now. I've just got hold of a place I've been wanting for a long time. It's seven miles out of the town; it's got all you want, hill and valley and a trout-stream, and splendid woods. The work people could have the run of the place on holidays and Sundays; we can't leave them out, you know. You also know just as well as I what the result of that will be. It will spoil the place more or less, but we can't help that. The shrinking retirement of the hereditary land-owner would not suit either of us; and, after all, the poor devils can't spoil everything, and in time perhaps they'll take a personal interest in the place, and spare the branches, and light their pipes with their sandwich wrappers."

In obedience to his eyes, Joyce murmured something sweetly. To her immense relief it proved to be enough. Full of interest and happiness, James went on blithely.

"Of course we could only be there during slack times, and when I'm not experimenting. There's a lot to be found out in chemical works; one man's life isn't long enough for all the new things that keep knocking imperatively at his—sense of curiosity. But even to know that the place and the beauty were there ready waiting for us wouldn't be bad. How does it strike you?"

"Oh! Shall we sit down there on that log?" said Joyce.

"My dear child, yes! What's bothering you?"

"Please let us sit down."

They were now in the sweet solemn hush of a wood of ancient oaks and beeches, their rich summer darkness melting far in the distance into feathery fringes of the tender green of young larches, visible in opaline, soft, shimmering flashes through the dim leafy aisles of the greater trees. Brecon Park stood on a hill, literally in the heart of its great woods; and to lay an axe to the root of one of their mighty trees was to the men of the Rawson House very much like putting a knife into his own heart; but to plant and prune, was in the very marrow of his bones.

From the left wing of the house one stepped down terraces through a jungle of tall fair lilies, guarded by a swaggering red regiment of Aaron's rods, which ran like a live flame around the wilderness of flowers into the very hush and the cool of the slumberous woods.

It was here in this pleasant place that since the day in which she had given up her post beside James' bed Joyce had come to realise inexorably the unimportance of herself, the importance of that she had to give or to withhold. Above all, the overwhelming importance of the one man she dared not cheat, and the other she dared not love.

"I have a dreadful thing to say to you," she began, lamely; "an incredible sort of thing." Now that she had at last strung herself to the effort, and with her nerves dulled with pain and horror, she could speak steadily in low, even tones. "Please sit down and let me say everything. Then you can speak. I think I absolutely adore you," she said slowly, her hands pressed down on her knees, her eyes, grown old suddenly, staring with dilated pupils out into the gloom of the woods. "I simply adore you—but I simply can't marry you!"

"You!—simply can't marry me!"

"I've tried—I've tried! Oh! if only you knew how I've tried——"

"You've tried! God in Heaven! what is it all about?" He sprang to his feet and stood towering above her.

"I've tried to love—but I can't," she went on, her hands pressing down more heavily on her knees. "You can't make yourself love—adoring is nothing." Her voice broke off sharply.

"So it seems. Go on," he said harshly, speaking at last out of the deathly silence. "There must be some cause, reasonable or unreasonable, for this—remarkable attitude."

His voice fell like a dull blow on her immovability, splintering it. She threw up both her hands convulsively, flinched and shuddered.

"I've only just found out really what loving means,"

she said, her face twitching. "I didn't know—I knew nothing when I began——"

"Well?" His voice was thick and heavy with restrained passion. "Well?"

"It was so new when I began——"

"It's some little time now since you began. I was foolish enough to believe that you'd— Ha! you have, then! So that's it! Heart of my heart," he muttered, looking away from her, "is this the end—this?"

"Oh! I know everything now. Love teaches, oh! how it teaches! I know what I make you suffer. I know the evil I've done! but I know, most of all, I know what love is—that it's the biggest thing one has to give, and one must give it honestly. I couldn't marry you on a lie. Some—some people," she said, catching her breath, "one might—people that don't matter. But not you—oh! not you. You're too big! I couldn't."

James threw back his massive head and stood silent in the grip of his passion.

"There's hardly an inch to choose between Jock Hallows and me," he said at last, bitterly.

"Will you listen? Will you listen?" she entreated.

"Certainly. I'm immensely interested."

The sneer stung her to her feet. She looked from side to side, seeing nothing, her eyes wild and bright, her lips shaking. James turned fiercely, caught her shoulder in a cruel grip, and crushed her down on the seat. Then he fell back, his breath coming hard.

The very childishness of her words, the bald ineloquence, but made them the more inexorable. There was clearly life and death in the question for the girl, and she had fought up step by step to this amazing climax. It did not even occur to James to protest.

"Go on!" he said, "I'll listen."

"When I found what love was——"

"May I ask when you found out what love was?"

"When you both lay there dead I thought. Then I knew."

"Oh!"

"I don't give up things easily," she said faintly; "then

after I knew—I tried harder—but—but love wouldn't come. James, James, can't you see the awfulness of it—the shame? I can't love you, and no one else has asked for my love or wants it. And if he did," she cried, with sudden passion, "I'd loathe and hate him. Can't you see I'm hurting you and being—the disgrace of my family for nothing. I can't be false to myself—and I can't be false to you. It's my dull bringing up; I can't take things lightly. But how could any one take you lightly?" she cried, despairingly, with a worshipping glance. James fairly laughed, but it was a laugh that shook her.

"You're tremendously plucky. On the whole it would have been ever so much easier to marry me."

He stood bolt upright, watching her with passionate intensity. And the youth on her stricken face made a band tighten like iron round his throat. She sighed brokenly.

"It would have been far easier. But I have hardly learnt to pretend; I can't keep on lying."

James could deal heavily with himself, but not with her.

"Poor little George Washington," he murmured, with an abrupt laugh.

An extraordinary sort of awe of him was falling upon her. She wrenched herself out of it sharply, and looked straight in his face.

"I needn't excuse—Mr. Hallows to you. But I wish I could make you understand that it isn't for his sake I'm telling you—everything. It's because I must, for my own sake. I—I can't marry one man and be thinking every instant of the other."

Joyce felt herself shrivelling up under his burning eyes, but she forged on valiantly.

"If I'm false to myself now, I shall be built on a lie, and be false all the rest of my life to every one and every thing."

"I have heard of the profound egoism possible in woman! By the way, if you don't think it necessary to excuse Jock Hallows to me," he said, more gently, "you should know better than to excuse yourself."

"There's no excuse for me," she said, miserably.

"Except from me. I love you now; I shall love you always. I couldn't condemn you. From every point of view of every one of your relatives you're probably inexcusable. Come! little Joyce, let us go home."

He looked up in the green tree-tops to the soft warm veil of blue mist above them, through the rifts of which the great sapphire sky, sublime and immutable behind all the changes and chances of the wayward clouds, looked down with the ineffable, gentle, serene relentlessness of all those infinite things which are from Everlasting.

"A wood is a place to be glad in. Why did you choose it for this?" said James. And that was his last word of reproach. She was so young, so shaken, so despairing, and he loved her wholly, and forever.

A perfect love understands most things, and it can forgive all. But even in the tender shadows of the wood he looked old and his quiet face was ashen.

Before they got out into the open he put his hand on her shoulder and fetched her up short.

"We'll say good-bye here," said he. She lifted her white face obediently, and he kissed her on her cold forehead, her rigid lips. He might have been kissing a stone.

But when they walked together blindly out into the full sunshine, all the tragedy was on Joyce's face. For James, with a supreme effort, had cleared the passion from his, and it had permanently resumed its unobtrusive stolidity—the impervious, persistent stolidity of an older man—a mask which occasionally covers some heroism, and a multitude of griefs.

"There's no use whatsoever in fooling round this business," he said presently, in his customary voice. "We'd better go straight back and get it over. Whew! There's the Faldeholm carriage. Fortune seems willing to oblige us; we can get it all done at a sitting now."

With a faint trace of pride Joyce lifted her bowed head.

"It's my part to tell them," she said.

"It's mine to see you safe through, at any rate, the first stage. I'm powerless, you see, in the chamber councils afterwards. Better keep some of your courage for these; you'll want it all. It certainly does require more pluck to jilt a man than to marry him, or, even so far as one can judge, to divorce him. There's clearly some disproportion somewhere."

She made some faint rejoinder. The tone of her words made his heart ache, but he took no heed of their sense. He was longing to be away alone with himself to collect his wits and his senses, and to gather up and bury his dead hopes decently.

The babble of tongues rollicking gayly through the open window across the scented air filled him with an irrational, mocking rage. But he held it steadily in check, and turned to Joyce.

"It will be a bad quarter of an hour," he said; "we'd better cut it as short as possible. Words won't help matters. Come!"

They were in the hall. He paused to look at her. Her face was quiet and white, and she had ceased to tremble. This was the most pathetic thing of all! Forthwith James himself began to tremble. To steady himself, he laid his hand heavily upon an oaken table.

"Oh! My dear! My dear!" he said. "It's grim and gruesome, and there's a horrid humour in it. And you're about the last girl in the world to face the sort of thing it is. But, come! it's, after all, only a—passing inconvenience."

His face was immovable again, and his hand steady on the door-knob.

It was a radiant group upon which they broke. Involuntarily Joyce threw up her hands to hide her ice-cold face, then both arms dropped at her sides, and she stood up, stiff words forming on her lips. But James put her gently down in a chair, turned to Lady Rawson, and proceeded after a somewhat marked fashion to demonstrate the valuelessness of superfluous words in the announcement of a signal defeat.

"I've tired her out," said James, "and we've been

having a fatiguing talk. Unpleasant communications don't improve by keeping, so I think it's just as well you should know at once that we've decided we're not on the whole suited to each other. It would be an immense kindness to both of us if you'd recognise right off the reel that this ending has come neither lightly nor of choice; that it's a bad blow to us—the worst blow of our lives—and that it's irrevocable, and would say therefore as little as possible about it. The sooner we can all put it behind us and leave it, the better for all of us."

One moment of throbbing silence, and then Lady Rawson lifted up her voice and spoke briefly.

"There's stark, staring madness somewhere!" Her lips refused to carry on their work. They snapped together like a rusty hasp. Then her eyes flung poisoned arrows at Joyce, who started to her feet, turned one hunted glance at the appalled eyes fixed upon her, and forthwith dropped her own.

"I may be mad," she said; "I don't know. I've tried to be sane; but I can't marry James honestly; I can't marry him."

The horrible bald simplicity of her statement struck her aunt as being positively indecent.

"This," she murmured, "is what comes of radical atheism."

Joyce was not attending to her; she had stopped to catch her breath.

"Not one of you," she went on, "except Mrs. Hallowes, knows in the least what James is—how great he is and how good, or," said Joyce, incoherently, "how utterly—utterly impossible it is to marry him——"

"This is madness!" pronounced her aunt, solemnly.

"I'm the only one to blame. It's I who've made the mistake. I've behaved horribly. You'll have to think of me what you like. It's right to me, but it's wrong to you, and nothing can make it right. I don't suppose any of you will ever forgive me"—her eyes, swimming with tears, rested upon James—"any one but you. There's no one in the whole world like you, no one, and

that's what makes it so quite impossible to marry you. It's just that."

With one big, bursting sob, she turned and fairly fled from the room.

And then the tongues of the family were let loose, and words snapped like pistol-shots. Mrs. Hallowes alone sat silent, with heightened colour, her eyes on the ground.

James, who had turned also when Joyce did, checked himself and, upon an odd impulse, fetched up beside Cecilia.

"I think you understand all about it," he said in a low tone, which reached her steadily through all the buzzing of tongues. "The poor little thing did her best; but I was too nasty a fence. She funk'd me!"

The gentleness and pain in Mrs. Hallowes' kind eyes of a sudden subdued his bitterness.

"It's a sad, scarred sort of a world," he said. "It's a good thing there's plenty to do in it."

"It's a good thing," she said, with a long, grave, sweet look at him, "that anything you do—and you'll do a great deal—you'll do well; and you'll do it better"—she laid her hand on his arm—"you must believe me in this—James Coates, you'll do it better because of this. You'll see clearer and walk straighter, and believe more faithfully, for your love will raise you, not debase you. Your ideal may be a fool—I'm inclined to think that she is—but you love her worthily, and she's worthy of your love. There's not one of us who isn't proud of you, and glad that you've come into our lives to stay. Later, when you've triumphed over grief, you will come back to us. Meanwhile I shall feel that now I have two sons instead of one—your mother won't be jealous—and remember, I expect great things of you."

James laughed oddly.

"I'll remember," he said; "and meanwhile, I think the sooner I clear out of this the better."

In the awful pause following upon the fateful announcement of Joyce, the smile which on his entrance had irradiated the honest countenance of Anthony appeared

to have become frozen there. It now contracted, flickered, and went out.

"From all blindness of heart, good Lord, deliver us!" he muttered. "That an entire community should be hoodwinked, open-eyed, in this astonishing manner by one damn—hem—meek-eyed bread and butter minx. An unconsidered Radical trifle!" He glanced apologetically at James. "Like Providence, the chit is impersonal and spreads devastation with an open hand, on the just and the unjust alike." Again he threw an apologetic glance at James, and thought bitterly of Jock. "My dear Rawson, I'm as sorry for the young man as though he had been a son of my own."

"Hem!" said the bewildered Baronet, glancing at Betty, a spark of fuller understanding awaking slowly in his mild eye. "'Pon my soul, so am I! The little girl," he added, with fine simplicity, "has certainly upset the apple-cart for the lot of us, and Gad!"—he looked grudgingly, but with some discreet benevolence, at James—"with all his disqualifications, he's too good a fellow to be made an open ass of in this way at the last minute. It's unhandsome, to say the least of it." His glance wandered confusedly around the room, rounding up in a helpless way upon his outraged wife. "It's unhandsome to all of us; really, very inconsiderate of my niece. Most unpleasant position!"

"Confoundedly so! my dear Rawson," said Anthony, with restored calm. For now, justly exasperated because of the rank idiocy of the other man, he was already struggling to his philosophic feet. "We're all sailing for the moment in the 'Ship of Fools,' which possibly serves us right," he added, suavely. "We've been endowing a woman—the apostle of the unexpected—with reason and a sense of humour, and working up from these premises. The task demands divine insight. No mortal man can reason from a sliding premise on a fixed point of view, and not be confounded. My dear Cecilia, it gets late."

Whilst the tongues still wagged wildly, James had thrown his clothes into his portmanteau and was ready

to catch the next train. He departed, protestations as to the crass, stark lunacy of his lost love resounding in his ears.

* * * * *

A few weeks later, after a heavy night's watching in his laboratory, with just an hour or so of sleep, James came down feeling dull and old.

Since his return upon that scented evening in May—soft puffs of the perfume of lilacs used to reach him still amidst his chemicals and confound his calculations—he had been working insistently. And into his work he threw a quiet, concentrated, absorbed energy, which aroused a good deal of the religious spirit in his simple following.

It drove his mother to her knees, and the faithful old servants of his factory to rank blasphemy.

James felt sincerely concerned because of the disorder in the emotions of his belongings, and their quaint expression of them afforded him some grim amusement.

But he knew that he must be at something. And work—so he told himself—was for the moment his most convenient method of going to the devil.

He was now beginning rather to wonder what his next step in the precious business might haply be. Consequently a letter from Elinor, the first he had received since he left Brecon Park, filled him with a queer excitement. He opened it greedily, but the words jiggled before his dizzy eyes. He put it in his pocket doggedly, controlled himself to reply to the diffident, fearful questions of his mother, and endure unmoved her flurried glances.

But he got to Elinor's letter at last.

"Things move slowly in these parts," she said; "even passing events leave their mark. But your colossal affair has cut seemingly into the very foundations of the local earth. The neighbourhood is still tottering round with limp backbone and held breath, waiting upon developments. The attitude will soon grow ludicrous and cast ridicule where none is due, and probably induce

apoplexy. Before it brings all this to pass you must come to us. Everything now waits for the heavy father. The stage is clear; the audience breathless. But directly you come you'll take the commonness out of everything, as you always do, and we can all hold up our heads again, and take our griefs and our disappointments standing—as you take yours. Besides, there's so little sheer pure joy in the world, why should it be huddled up in a veil of shame, cringing away miserably in a corner? It ought to shine out clear and fearless, so as to lighten up sad hearts. And so, will you come? To us, of course. Herbert will meet you. You can walk across from the station, and the baker will bring your portmanteau in his cart."

Whereupon James came and had it out with Jock like a man.

And just three months later James and Elinor, walking back to the village from Brecon Park, paused to look at the host of carriages rolling down the broad avenue between the grave, tall trees.

"Jock Hallows and you are the only two men in England who could have brought this to pass here," she said slowly, "on the original *mise en scène*, in the very teeth of the County, without grotesqueness. It was all grave and sweet and dignified to-day, and absolutely right. You and Jock were right, also. Neither of them had done any real harm. It would have been a paltry scandal had she been married miserably from that unspeakable rectory. It would have shadowed all her future. The divorce court would have been a fool to it. To-day I watched like a cat. No one even wanted to laugh at the wrong moment."

"But there was a good deal of laughing."

"And you laughed the best! I'm glad she dares to worship you openly. I can understand her better now, and hate her less. It's a pretty study in unconscious bigamy. And, James, whatever changes, we remain the same always, you and I? It will be something—some little thing to watch and keep count of each other's success. Won't it, dear?"

But James did not hear her. He was following methodically each step of that wonderful first journey together which he had missed. "They're at the junction now," he was telling himself, "and in two minutes they'll be rushing through Merton."

THE END.

